



# Student Newsletter

Issue 7 – July 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-belonging@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk).

# Welcome to your newsletter!

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

You can learn about our rebrand to Open SU, our recently-held by-elections, the student issues discussed at the last Student Leadership Team meeting, and you can meet our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Student Representative. We have some games, too!

There is also key information regarding Library Study Volunteer request forms and our Individual Representation Service.

There are some fantastic student submissions in this issue that are definitely worth a read, and we hope they'll inspire others to write to us.

We've marked Pride Month with an article for the LGBTQIA+ student community, with information about support services and another fantastic student submission.

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 our 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 sixth birthday was celebrated on 8 April 2025.

Want to write an article for the next edition?

**Find out how on the back cover!**

## Contents

2 What the OU has done for me

3 Student Union snapshots

5 Changes to the Library Study Volunteer request form (and how to make the most of it)

7 Hard living / living hard

8 Individual Representation Service for students in secure environments

9 Take Five to Age Well

10 Stories from within – writing challenge

11 Collective Collaborations & Open Doors

13 Mind gym

14 Celebrating Pride beyond June

17 Want to study with The Open University?

# What the OU has done for me

Take a look at this inspirational piece from one of our SiSE students.

---

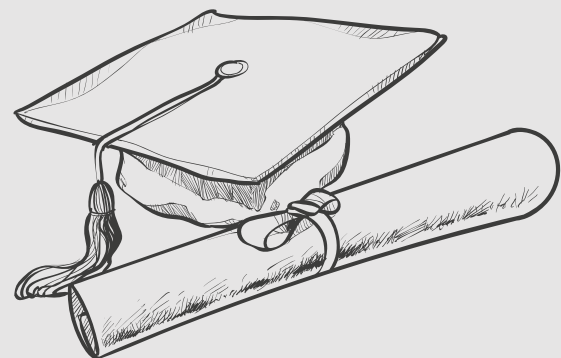
I left school with zero qualifications and worked in kitchens as a porter until I was 22 when I saw men double my age working 18 hour days, six days a week, and I knew I wanted something that wouldn't destroy my body or social life.

I'd always had a keen interest in history and politics, and the best days out for me would be walking around museums, so I looked at the OU's History short course and tried one to test if I had the aptitude – at the same time my drug use was increasing. I did my A111 and when I got a silly certificate in the post after my first year, I cried because I did something and I'd never really felt that before.

Then I got arrested. I thought my life was over, and I am not afraid to admit that I made a good attempt on my life because I'd lose my flat and car and I thought I wouldn't be able to continue my degree. That's a lot of money all together. But once I was out of remand I found out I could pick up right where I left off. I am now on my EMA A113 and so excited for the future: I can't wait to see how far education will take me. It has not only improved me as a person but also my reading, writing (I do lots of writing competitions now) and employability. I can also hold fascinating conversations that I was unable to do before.

The OU saved my life and I bid anyone: please take the leap. I never thought I could ever. However it's still four years away but I'm excited to graduate and so could you!

Best of luck to all you other OU students.



# Student Union snapshots

This section provides the latest updates and news from your Open SU.

---

## A new chapter begins

After more than 50 years as the Open University Students Association, we have started a new chapter.

On Wednesday, 21 May, we became known as **Open SU** – the union for OU students. You may have spotted our new logo on the front page!

Creating a new brand is a big task, and OU students have been involved in every step, from voting for the change last year, to sending in thoughts and ideas, to taking part in design workshops for our new branding.

By using the term 'union', we hope to help everyone better understand the important work we do, and to raise awareness of the support, representation and opportunities we provide.

Our mission remains the same – to make a positive difference for all OU students. We will continue to work collaboratively with the University to ensure that students are at the centre of decision-making.

## Student issues discussed by the Student Leadership Team

During February's Student Leadership Team (SLT) meeting (held quarterly), the team discussed the top two student issues voted on via the OU students website.

These were “searchable PDF module books” and our “social media” platforms.

Whilst some students in secure environments may not have access to social media platforms or digital media, it is worth noting that the Student Leadership Team made a collective decision to place on hold using X.com, formerly known as Twitter, with a review to be taken after a certain period. The reason for this was due to questions surrounding the values of the student union, and if certain social media platforms aligned to these values. The team also highlighted that some social media platforms' policies were not always supportive of our students or our values – however, we could not step away from social media altogether as we still engage with students in this environment.

Likewise, in terms of searchable PDF module books, some SiSEs may not have access to these but instead will receive paper copies of the module books, as well as copies of the module virtual learning environment (VLE).

What challenges do you find difficult when studying in a secure environment, and how can the Student Leadership Team support you? Please get in touch to let us know (see the back page).

## Successful by-elections

We recently held by-elections to elect students onto our Student Leadership Team. There were nine positions up for grabs – Vice President roles in Administration, Community & Engagement, and Student Welfare; Faculty Representative positions in Business & Law and Open & Access; Area Representative for Scotland; Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Representative; and the new roles of Disabled Students Representative and LGBTQIA+ Representative.

Nominations were opened in March and the results were then announced on Friday, 9 May.

We're delighted that we now have a full remit of 22 students on our Student Leadership Team, reflecting our mission as Open SU to make a positive difference for all OU students.

If you have an issue that you want a specific Rep to raise for you, you can write to us (see the back page) and we will pass your message on to them.

## Hello everyone!

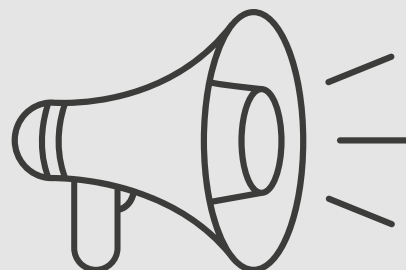
Thank you for keeping in the loop with everything we are up to at Open SU via The Hoot Newsletter. There are a lot of exciting projects going on at the moment, aimed at improving a wide range of things for students.

I am the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for 2024–26. It was a great privilege to be elected and voted in as VP EDI by my fellow students nearly a year ago.

A little bit about me: I have now completed my studies in Criminology and Law, which I thoroughly enjoyed. This subject interested me a lot and aligned with my passions. Beyond studying, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is my life!

When I first learned that Students in Secure Environments fall under my scope as VP EDI, I was incredibly pleased. I have worked with people in such environments in the past and seen, first hand, how important and helpful education can be. Whether it be providing future career opportunities or supporting mental health, education is such a valuable tool. The Open University has been a lifeline for many individuals.

That being said, I want to hear from you, the students, to hear how things could change to better support you. I will never promise to change every single thing, but I will definitely give it a good go!



# Changes to the Library Study Volunteer request form (and how to make the most of it)

---

If you use the Library Study Volunteer request form to ask for articles or resources to support your studies, here are a few important updates you should know about, and some top tips that can help make sure you get the most relevant and useful materials back.

## What's changing?

The request form will be updated ready for the new academic year to help student volunteers find what you need more easily and quickly. Hopefully the changes will make it easier to say exactly what you're looking for. However, it's still up to you to give the best possible information to help the volunteers source what you need.

We hope the updated form will get to all of you without delay. However, if you still only have access to the "old" form, please don't worry. We will still accept it.

Here are a few things the OU Library wants you to keep in mind:

- **No OU module materials or set books:** Unfortunately, we can't send out OU textbooks or set readings, even for your own module. If you need these, contact the OU's SiSE Accessibility team for guidance.
- **Copyright limits apply:** You can usually get one chapter per book or one article per journal volume. Full books can't be printed and sent, even if they're available online.
- **You can ask for specific resources by name:** For example, an article or book chapter you've heard about but it's about 50/50 whether the Library has it. If they don't, the student volunteer may find you a good alternative.



## Tips for filling in the form

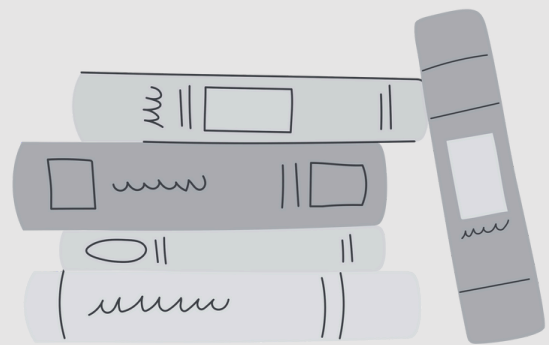
Want better results from your request? Here's how to give the volunteers what they need to help you:

- **Be specific about your topic – try to narrow it down:** For example, instead of “Jane Austen”, ask for “Portrayal of gender in the works of Jane Austen”. Instead of “childhood obesity”, ask for “Link between junk food advertising and childhood obesity in the UK”.
- **Ask for the type of resource you want:** For example, if you're looking for peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters or encyclopedia entries, be sure to say so.
- **Include a date range if that's important to your assignment:** For example, “Please find resources published within the last 10 years.”
- **Give full references (when you can):** If you've found the name of an article or book in your course materials, include as much detail as possible: title, author, date, etc.
- **Suggest keywords:** Volunteers use search terms to find articles in the Library database. If you can suggest some keywords, that's a big help.

## Need help?

If you have questions about the form or the process, the SiSE Accessibility team is there to support you.

As always, the Library Study Volunteer service is here to help you explore new ideas, back up your arguments, and get the most from your studies – so make your request count!



## Hard living / living hard

A student submitted this poem last year – we welcome any creative writing submissions from our students.

Content warning: drug use and strong language.

---

The homeless on the street  
broken and downtrodden  
the people walk by  
on the cities forgotten

Millionaires live it up  
in their multi-room mansions  
a life of fancy cars and  
the latest runway fashions

Junkies rattling hoping to score  
shooting up with needles  
found on the floor

Politicians tell us we are  
in this together  
they are full of hot air  
bluster and blether

The old and the elderly  
can't heat up their homes  
they will die in their  
chairs cold and alone

The upper classes  
move further from the masses  
all they see is the world  
through their rose-coloured glasses

There should be moral  
to this story  
when life turns to shit  
just smile  
and don't worry



# Individual Representation Service for students in secure environments

---

The Individual Representation Service is delivered by Open SU for students who are experiencing some challenges with The Open University during their studies. The service supports students with raising a complaint or appealing a decision, and is available to current students, recent graduates, and those who have withdrawn from their studies.

Our service is confidential and independent from the University, ensuring impartial advice that is in the best interest of the student. Many SiSE students may struggle to determine if their issues warrant a complaint or appeal. To assist with this, here are some common issues we support students with:

- Complaints relating to the quality of module course content.
- Delay in receiving relevant module materials.
- Appealing the marking of your assignment, and challenging module results.
- Support with responding to accusations of academic misconduct.
- Complaints relating to the quality of service received from support services, such as the SiSE team at the OU.

So how can the Individual Representation Service help you? Well, our support and advice includes (but is not limited to):

- Providing guidance and advice to you about your complaint or appeal.
- Supporting you to navigate and understand relevant University policies

and procedures that apply to your case.

- Assisting you with the preparation of the complaint or appeal and the collation of evidence.
- Representing you at any relevant meetings and hearings, such as central disciplinary hearings.

If you are unsure whether the service can help you, please get in touch. If we are unable to help, we will happily direct you to relevant resources or refer you to someone who can help.

## Student feedback

“You really supported me in my time of need. They made me feel heard and thoroughly explained everything to me in a way that wasn't confusing. Without them my anxiety levels would have been sky high.”

“Would highly recommend this service. The staff are lovely and supportive every step of the way. I wouldn't have been able to manage without their support.”

## How do I access support?

SiSE students can access our service by asking their Educational Officer to email us at [oustudents-studentadvice@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-studentadvice@open.ac.uk). Alternatively, you can write to us at Open SU, PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE.

We ask students to provide as much information as possible on their issue. Once student details are received, an advisor will be in touch within three to five working days.

# Take Five to Age Well

The 'Take Five to Age Well' initiative, launched by The Open University's Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS), is a UK-wide public health campaign designed to empower individuals of any age to embrace healthier lifestyles. This campaign encourages participants to commit to a month of simple, evidence-based habits aimed at enhancing physical, mental, and social wellbeing

## The Five Pillars of Ageing Well

At the core of the campaign are the 'Five Pillars of Ageing Well', developed by a Senior Lecturer in Health and Social Care at the OU. These five pillars are:

- Eat: Prioritising balanced nutrition.
- Drink: Maintaining adequate hydration.
- Move: Engaging in regular physical activity.
- Connect: Fostering social interactions.
- Engage and Think: Stimulating the mind through creative and cognitive activities.

Participants are encouraged to incorporate these pillars into their daily routines, aiming to establish lasting habits that contribute to healthy ageing.



Here's a variety of simple activities that can help promote healthy habits across physical, mental and social wellbeing:

1. Eat – Support your body with good nutrition
  - Eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
  - Swap one processed snack per day for a healthier option, like nuts or yogurt.
2. Drink – Stay properly hydrated
  - Start each day with a glass of water.
3. Move – Keep your body active
  - Take a brisk walk each day.
  - Try chair-based exercises or stretching.
  - Do balance exercises, like standing on one leg while brushing your teeth.
4. Connect – Strengthen social relationships
  - Engage with someone every day.
  - Participate in community events or groups, if possible.
  - Write a letter to someone.
5. Engage and Think – Stimulate your brain
  - Read for 20 minutes daily.
  - Do puzzles, such as crosswords, Sudoku or jigsaw puzzles (see page 13).
  - Try creative hobbies, like drawing, writing or origami.
  - Practice mindfulness.

## Tips for your actions

**Make it specific:** choose an action and make sure it's quantifiable. For instance, you may want to eat five pieces of fruit or vegetables a day, or cut down to eight units of alcohol, or walk for 30 minutes every day. Whatever it is – make sure you can measure it.

**Make it achievable:** you know yourself better than anyone – choose actions that are challenging but attainable. Remember, you need to do this every day so make sure it's something you will be able to do.

So, whether you're sipping more water, hopping on one foot whilst brushing your teeth, or mastering the fine art of origami, the Take Five to Age Well project is all about making small changes that add up to a healthier, happier you. Ageing well doesn't have to mean overhauling your life – it just takes five simple steps and a little commitment. So go on – take five, feel better, and enjoy the journey.

---

## Stories from within – writing challenge

Take part in our writing challenge! Submit your piece for a chance to be featured in one of our upcoming issues!

---

Building on the ideas from our previous article, we hope you will be able to find small yet meaningful ways to boost your physical health and wellbeing. Living in a secure environment can bring unique challenges, but it also invites creativity in finding what works best for you. We'd love to hear how you've discovered alternative ways to support your mental and physical health, and in doing so, perhaps inspire others to take their own steps toward exploring new possibilities to look after themselves.

To accompany our first topic, *"This is how I look after my wellbeing"*, we're excited to launch a new series of writing challenges. Whether it's a short story, a reflection, a personal tip or a poem, we welcome your contributions.

In collaboration with our Writing Club and Poetry Society, we will set a new theme in each issue, and ask for your submissions by post or by email with help from your education advisor. Our email address is [oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk).

A quick note: because of publishing rules within secure environments that apply to us, we're not allowed to include names in the newsletter. So, while we can't print your name alongside your work, your words and experiences will still have a big impact.

We also publish our Hoot for SiSE Newsletter articles on our online Hoot page, so that's another thing for you to bear in mind when you make submissions. It will appear online in a public space (without your name).

# Collective Collaborations & Open Doors

This submission describes an OU student's experience studying in a secure environment and how it helped them in many ways, including their mental health and wellbeing.

---

The cell door might be shut and locked, as will the front gate, but the metaphorical door of the mind is always open and ready to learn. And that's the frustration!

The first hurdle for any SiSE learner is frustration; feelings of hopelessness, of not being in control of learning, unable to access resources – something as simple as a handout (posted, but lost in the 'snail mail' of prison) or video links having a word flagged up by the filter, blocked. In fact, getting hold of a computer to complete assignments is a luxury for some. That's been the experience of a Category 'C' (closed) prison, as most learners who've had experience of one will testify, you are shep'herded' practically everywhere.

Enter 'Collective Collaboration & Open Doors' (that's what I'm going to call it); after months, and for some, years, the frustration and 'banging head against wall' scenarios, Distance Learning begins to have credible meaning, bringing with it new opportunities in a Category 'D' (open) prison, to collaborate with 'like-minded' people and embark upon the banquet of resource-rich courses. Yes, believe it or not, it has been a simple transition, as have the strategies to make it a reality. These could easily be replicated in other institutions to provide a flourishing experience of Distance Learning.

Personally, for me, it has been the freedom and ease of transition to be able to, through Collective Collaborations, meet and chat with other Distance Learners in the prison setting. The beauty of this creates a sense of belonging, of camaraderie, fulfilling the same purpose as Student Tutorials. Rather than meeting with a Lecturer, Distance Learners are identified and invited to informal monthly forums and coffee mornings with others, creating a Distance Learning 'community'.

An IT Suite is a luxury at the best of times, but in our setting, this doubles as an informal Distance Learner discussion venue – a platform to converse and deliberate themes, issues relating to esoteric concepts, 'throw around' academic ideas – the opportunity to talk about common problems relating to similar assignments, where people studying the same course can openly share thoughts, give tips and other helpful advice to their colleagues, in a non-threatening and inclusive environment.

Additionally, access to computers for two full days and evenings per week to complete assignments (VC – Virtual Campus); the real game-changer has been the ability to access the plethora of (whitelisted) research websites that would normally be deemed inappropriate.

Most will agree, any kind of learning, especially Distance Learning in a secure environment, opens the metaphorical doors of the mind; immensely helping with your mental health and well-being, providing much needed relief and focus from the tedium that is 'bird'. It goes even further, by providing you with the skills that will hopefully open the many doors of opportunity once you are back in the community; luxurious in the peace of mind of having a qualification.





# Mind gym



To support your Take Five to Age Well pledge to stay mentally active, we've included a few puzzles to help keep your mind engaged – and hopefully entertained!

Please note: not everyone will have their own copy, so if you're able, we kindly ask that you copy the puzzles and solutions onto a separate sheet of paper. That way, more people can join in and enjoy the fun!

Answers and solutions can be found on page 16.

---

## Quiz

1. What is the capital of Australia?
  2. In which year did the London Underground start to operate?
  3. What is the chemical formula for table salt?
  4. What is a baby hedgehog called?
  5. Which poet composed 'To Autumn' in 1819?
- 

## Sudoku

If you're unfamiliar with Sudoku, here's a brief description: Sudoku is a logic-based number puzzle played on a 9x9 grid, divided into nine 3x3 subgrids. The objective is to fill the grid so that each row, column, and 3x3 subgrid contains all the numbers from 1 to 9 without repeating any. Some numbers are already provided as clues, and players must use logic and deduction to fill in the rest. We've included three different difficulty levels here, so you can challenge yourself at your own pace.

8	6	7		5	1			
9	1	2			3		4	
	3			4	9			
		8		2		1		
		4		3				
2		1	4		6	8		7
4	6		2			7	9	
1			9		7		8	5
7		9	6	8	3	1		

Easy

5				8	7	2		
	2	8	1	4			3	5
	9							
3			8	9	1			
				5				
9	1	4			2	5		
1			7					
					3		6	7
		7			8	9		1

Medium

	5						6	
	3	9			6			2
			7					
	4			6		3		
			9	5	2			
		6			3			7
4	8			3	9			5
					4		8	
1		5						4

Hard

# Celebrating Pride beyond June: supporting our community all year long

Although Pride Month officially wraps up at the end of every June, the spirit of Pride – celebrating LGBTQIA+ identities, uplifting voices, fostering inclusive communities and carrying on the movement for equity – should resonate throughout the entire year. As we head into July, we're committed to keeping the momentum of Pride alive by highlighting support services that offer connection and care for LGBTQIA+ individuals in secure settings.

---

## Bent Bars Project

The Bent Bars Project is a letter-writing initiative that connects LGBTQIA+ people inside prisons with LGBTQIA+ volunteers on the outside. The project aims to challenge the isolation faced by individuals in the prison system by building relationships through regular correspondence. The simple act of receiving a letter can offer comfort, validation, and a crucial reminder that no one is forgotten.

If you're in prison and would like a pen pal or more information about the Bent Bars Project, please write to the Bent Bar Project team at the address below. They will respond with a discreet letter, respecting your privacy and confidentiality:

Bent Bars Project  
PO Box 66754  
London  
WC1A 9BF

## Lavender Pages

Lavender Pages is a solidarity project for LGBTQIA+ prisoners, run by a collective of queer, trans and gender non-conforming abolitionists. They send reading material written primarily by LGBTQIA+ authors to incarcerated people across the UK.

They run a subscription service sending books, zines and educational material written primarily by LGBTQIA+ authors four times a year, free of charge. However, they do not have capacity to fulfil personalised requests for specific books at this time.

If you are an LGBTQIA+ incarcerated person and would like to sign up to their service, or know someone who is, you can contact them by writing to their PO Box to receive a subscription form. They accept all applications, regardless of charges or convictions:

Lavender Pages Project  
PO Box 66754  
London  
WC1A 9BF

In this issue, we also wanted to centre and uplift voices from the trans and non-binary community, especially in light of the recent Supreme Court ruling on the legal definition of women-only spaces, which would have undoubtedly caused a lot of concern and worry for the community. Below, we share a personal story from a former OU SiSE student, who generously offered his inspiring experience to feature in our newsletter.

---

I left school with nothing and went into security at 19. I was told I was pretty big for a girl and decided that was the only way I could get a job that meant I could wear a shirt and tie, regardless of how people saw me. However, life didn't go to plan. I felt my life spiralling until I found myself in prison. I felt like I had hit the floor so many times that I didn't know where the bottom was.

I had never been in a safe enough place to be completely out and live as a man. Yet sat in a female prison, I knew I had lost everything. Even the birth certificate that said I was born female. I knew then that a lifetime of pretending to be something I wasn't had got me here. I came out as transgender, changed my paperwork within the prison, and it felt like I could finally breathe.

Each day, I discovered what kind of man I was. It wasn't easy. I faced challenges from both staff and prisoners, but this time, it was on my terms. I got a trusted position in prison. Started writing poetry to get my feelings out.

Got onto an Open University course for arts and humanities, and I felt myself growing. All the old thoughts were being pushed away, and the doubt and anger started to fade. Education was the door that kept on opening when all the lights went out at night.

I read books and changed my mindset one day at a time. I applied for more higher education schemes in the prison and entered the Koestler awards.

By the time I got out, I wanted more. I applied for a university place and was rejected due to my criminal record, but then carried on writing and being creative to get out my head. I co-wrote a play called *High Risk*, and we performed it on stage to raise money for our bail hostel. Every negative I looked for the positive. I applied again to university and got in. Then got diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia. It was not easy. But it was the goal way off I kept looking at, and every barrier began to slip away.

Before I knew it, I was standing in front of my family, who was watching me accept my degree. I stood there as an openly transgender man holding my degree and thought "I wanted my master's degree". My goal post moved. I am now nearly finishing my master's and am looking toward my next graduation ceremony. I am no longer the boy who sat in a cell looking out at the world. I have been a Koestler's judge and wrote a book, *The Boy Behind The Wall*. I have been in prison, and talked in universities.

When I look at where I have been, I can't change it, but I have spent every day changing my reactions and making each day count.

We're incredibly grateful for your submissions – they're what make this Newsletter more meaningful and relevant to you. If you have a story that could uplift, empower, or resonate with others in your community, we'd love to hear it. Share your experience with us, and we may feature it in a future issue to inspire and connect with fellow readers.

## Mind gym – solutions

- What is the capital of Australia? Canberra
- In which year did the London Underground start to operate? 1863
- What is the chemical formula for table salt? NaCl (Sodium Chloride)
- What is a baby hedgehog called? Hoglet
- Which poet composed 'To Autumn' in 1819? John Keats

2	5	4	3	9	1	7	6	8
7	3	9	4	8	6	5	1	2
6	1	8	7	2	5	4	9	3
5	4	1	8	6	7	3	2	9
8	7	3	9	5	2	6	4	1
9	2	6	1	4	3	8	5	7
4	8	2	6	3	9	1	7	5
3	9	7	5	1	4	2	8	6
1	6	5	2	7	8	9	3	4

5	4	3	6	8	7	2	1	9
7	2	8	1	4	9	6	3	5
6	9	1	2	3	5	8	7	4
3	5	6	8	9	1	7	4	2
8	7	2	4	5	6	1	9	3
9	1	4	3	7	2	5	8	6
1	6	9	7	2	4	3	5	8
2	8	5	9	1	3	4	6	7
4	3	7	5	6	8	9	2	1

8	4	6	3	7	9	2	5	1
9	1	2	5	6	8	3	7	4
5	3	7	1	2	4	9	6	8
3	7	5	8	9	2	4	1	6
6	8	4	7	3	1	5	2	9
2	9	1	4	5	6	8	3	7
4	6	8	2	1	5	7	9	3
1	2	3	9	4	7	6	8	5
7	5	9	6	8	3	1	4	2

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

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 Open SU

All Open University students are automatically members of Open SU.

Open SU (formerly known as 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 Student Union 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 to us!

Would you like to contribute an article for a future issue? Do you have a comment for us?

You can write to us using the pre-paid envelope we have enclosed, addressed to:  
The Hoot (SiSE edition), Open SU, PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE.

Alternatively, articles can be emailed to us at [oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk](mailto:oustudents-belonging@open.ac.uk).  
Please note that your published submissions will also appear on [thehootstudents.com](http://thehootstudents.com).