Live Hustings Transcription – President By-election 2017

Key To Speakers:
- RA  - Rob Avann (General Manager for OU Students Association)
- VR  - Verity Robinson  (Head of Student Support at OU Students Association)
- JBH - Joseph Brookes-Harmer
- YB  - Yanny Bruere
- IC  - Ian Cheyne
- LH  - Laura Hargreaves
- BH  - Billy Hill
- NS  - Nicola Simpson
- GB  - Gerald Barrass

RA  Good evening everyone, thanks for joining the OU Students Association for our President Hustings Event.

So I'm Rob Avann, General Manager for the OU Students Association and I'm joined tonight by my colleague Verity.

VR  Hi everyone, I am Verity and I am the Head of Student Support at the Students Association.

RA  Just a few words about the format tonight. For the first hour of the show we will be interviewing each of the candidates individually one by one. We only have a short amount of time with each, but we will be putting to them your questions that have been suggested on the forums. Each candidate has been asked to keep their responses concise and to the point, as we want to make sure we can get through as much as possible. Candidates do not know the questions they are to be asked tonight.

In the last half an hour or so of the show, Verity will be putting to the candidates your questions submitted throughout the show. Please post your questions on Facebook or via email to ousa-elections@open.ac.uk. Please keep them concise and we will try to get through as many as possible.

As a reminder, when making comments or asking questions please bear in mind we want this to be a positive and engaging show tonight.

As this is a live event with a live chat, we'd like to remind all participating of the spirit of the proceedings.
 Whilst members are responsible for their own comments and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Students Association, we encourage commentary that is:

- Are clear, “on topic” and that respond to the content.
- Have a positive/constructive tone.
- Are open to being contradicted by other listeners.

We discourage comments that:

- Are not “on topic” or are not responding to other comments.
- Are excessively long, unpleasant or negative in tone.

We will delete comments, without notice, that:

- Contain any personal attacks, foul language or hate speech.
- Are abusive, disruptive, harassing or threatening.
- Are libellous or defamatory.
- Contain advertising or spam.

Live here tonight in Milton Keynes we have Joseph Brookes-Harmer, Billy Hill, Laura Hargreaves and Nicola Simpson.

Yanny Bruere and Ian Cheyne are joining us remotely. Gerald Barrass was unable to make the live show tonight but we have recorded an interview with him which we will be playing later in the show.

Without further ado, when we return from this short break we will be interviewing Joseph Brookes-Harmer.

Interview with Joseph Brookes-Harmer

RA Okay so welcome back. So I am here with Joe Brookes-Harmer; good evening Joe.

JBH Good evening.

RA I've got a number of questions to run through with Jo for this first interview.

So Joe, let's start with a question from Marianne who asked, what preparation have you done to hit the ground running as President of the Students Association?

JBH So that's a very good question, thank you from Marianne indeed. At the moment I've done quite a lot of preparation for really getting ready and, as she would put it 'hitting the ground running'.

Basically what that preparation would involve is notifying every single detail of the role of the actual President, Trustee, all of the different memberships that would be involved, automatic memberships and I suppose really it's just getting to the heart of the situation - what the students want from the Student Association.

RA So far as part of this hustings process you're aware that students have had the opportunity to ask questions to all candidates via the online forum. You perhaps haven't been as involved as maybe some of the other candidates on this forum and so several students have asked how you will engage with students and with the rest of the student leadership team if you were to be elected.

JBH Absolutely. So, that's a very good point made.

I think at the end of the day when it comes to involvement and engagement and communication more essentially it’s a case of me being available as much as
possible, so as of late I haven't been available as much, from now on obviously hitting the ground running, as Marianne so rightly put it, is a case of really getting out there with fellow students and being available as much as possible, certainly when it involves all forms of social media, email, all communication and also face-to-face where available.

RA Could you clarify for us your understanding of OU re-design and the OU re-design project?

JBH Absolutely. So I think the OU re-design is a fantastic project that's going on. I think it's been needed for many years for the Open University. I think that at the moment it's a very good transitional stage to actually bring that forward.

I think the OU re-design what it means to me, especially as a student firstly, as a student it just means I can find things much more simpler, whether that be online, going through if I want to see a certain forum or a certain, if it was a tutor group forum or if it's finding information to contact the Student Support Team for whatever reason, so for me as a student firstly it's finding the actual need and requirement I want and it just brings it forward a lot more easier. Simplicity really and I think for many others, you know including staff, it's just all about that.

RA Sally is a student with disability and needs a variety of materials to study and she asked, how will you support students (such as Sally) to continue with their life-long learning?

JBH Well I think students such as Sally are vital and paramount to the Open University, especially with the Students Union I want to feel as though I can support people as much as possible.

Myself I suffer from a disability, I'm dyslexic myself, so I understand the needs and requirements of a disabled student and all students who require need. One of the biggest objectives on my manifesto is to actually find disabled students, really put them at the heart of what we do because I understand what it is like trying to find help and communication and luckily I found that through the brilliant Student Support Team, who are truly wonderful I may say.

RA In your manifesto you mentioned that being a member of the Student Association is 'a great privilege' was the term I think you used.

JBH Yes.

RA What do you think the Association should be doing for members?

JBH I think it's getting involved as much as possible with fellow student. What I would like to see as a student, as President of the Student Association is getting the Student Association, the awareness out as much as possible, that is paramount to me, it's absolutely number one key. So, the more awareness we raise of what's going on in the Student Unions, whether it be active things, upcoming events, anything like that it really brings that touch. It's the personal touch which I really want to bring forward.

RA One of the other things you talked about quite a lot in your manifesto was around career opportunities and wanting to really see those to be developed at the OU, so what particular ideas do you have in that direction?

JBH Yes that's right. Obviously in my term as President, should I be elected, I would like to see renewed opportunities brought forward.

So, that would be communicating with large companies, small companies, SMEs, small enterprise medium-sized businesses; I want to bring a lot forward to the Open University and I want to make it accessible at the end of the day, whether you're full
time or part time as student, you're giving six years part time of your life to the Open University, you gain your degree and then after that I want to make the transition as smooth as possible with as much notice as possible to the student so we can fit them in a career ASAP.

RA One final question before we wrap up, so a question from Ruth, how do you propose to use your current experience to balance the needs of the Association and the student body in order to be able to negotiate with the university in challenging times?

JBH I think that's a very good question from Ruth and I really respect her question after that.

I think more than anything what I want to bring forward for the Open University is I have the skills, the trust and the responsibilities to succeed as your President, should I be elected. I have a lot of experience managing my own company so I think bringing that forward, bringing the business decisions, bringing the logistics forward would really help and I think really it's a role that I am now ready to step into. I have a lot of 'give' for the Open University, they've given me a lot of chances in life and to gain a degree, get the job that you want that is paramount to me.

RA Thank you Joe.

JBH Thank you.

RA So thanks very much to Joe Brookes-Harmer and when we return after this short break we will be with Yanny Bruere.

 interviewing with Yanny Bruere (via Skype)

RA Good evening, Yanny Bruere.

YB Good evening Rob, how are you?

RA Yeah I'm very well thank you.

YB Good.

RA Thanks for joining us and just to go through, we've got a number of questions to ask you here that people have suggested on the forum. So, without further ado Yanny, the first question. You are fairly new to OU study, Steve has asked why you want to represent the student body and what do you think you can bring to the role of President as a relatively new student?

YB Yeah that's right, in my manifesto video I did say that I hadn't even heard of the OU SA before or even the President so I think what I want to bring is that engagement. I want to bridge the gap between the OU and the OU SA and the students and I think someone like me who hasn't been involved before who has just come to find the attention of it, just find out about the OU SA I think I'm in a good position to understand that, the gap there is and to bridge it.

RA You talk a lot in your manifesto about an engagement issue between the university and students, could you perhaps expand on that?

YB Yeah like I just mentioned obviously I never heard of the OU SA and I acknowledged in my video that some of that would be my fault but I think there could be more to do to engage people. I think the methods of emails and magazines are a bit archaic and we need to really modernise how we interact with people. Things like YouTube, I offered Periscope in my manifesto, so new ways of interacting with students in the modern day I think is necessary to engage.
RA I understand from your manifesto and from some of the comments that you'd made already on the forums that you're going to be stepping away from your business that you've got at the moment if you're elected. What skills would you say that you've gained from running your own business which will help you as a Trustee and as President?

YB I think you learn how to get things done. I think you learn tenacity. You learn to not take no for an answer and to really push forward even when everything feels like it's against you and you learn to work as a team, you learn to work together.

RA What would you say specifically perhaps gives you some experience that might be relevant to being a Trustee?

YB Being a Trustee, well I haven't had any direct experience. I've overseen a Board of Trustees so I haven't actually been a Trustee, I've appointed Trustees for a local business watchdog, so I was on part of the group where we interviewed Trustees and we put them in place basically.

RA David asked in the forums about OU re-design and the proposals so far. What are your thoughts on the current proposals and what would you seek to do if you felt that those proposals were not going to enhance the student experience?

YB I think ((line drops - inaudible)) the incoming President I think we've really got to try and defend our history, defend everything we've got at the moment, the online tutorials is a big one, the face-to-face tutorials as well. I think there's a lot to do with the re-design and - sorry there.

RA Just to repeat the back end of the question, what would you do if they didn't enhance the student experience?

YB A lot of them probably aren't going to enhance it, I think you can't save £100m a year without enhancing it and without de-hancing if you like so I think that we need to do is we need to be tough in our strategy moving forward and we all need to work together with the President, the CEC and the Trustee Board and we need to implement a new strategy moving forward on how we can defend and protect our core values and principles.

RA In terms of representing students, Sheila asked on the forum about students with disabilities and Jamie about students who were overseas. What different groups of OU students have you identified and how would you seek to represent those different interests?

YB Yeah it's a good question.

I note that we've already got the disabled students group and we've got a lot of other really good things going on like the night line, the peer support so I think it's about working with those groups and really making sure that we connect with the people. As I said, I'd never heard of these groups before and if I'd heard of night line for example it would have really helped me during this first year of studying, it really would. I think if we just make everyone more aware of what we have and the really good infrastructure we've already put in place I think that's key to really moving forward.

RA So a real focus around communication, Yanny, would you say?

YB Yes, absolutely, just making people aware of what we've got, because like I said we've got some really good things in place but not many people know about them so they're not benefitting from them, so yeah making people aware of what's already in place and the good work that's everyone's already doing.
RA  One final question. What preparation would you say you've done to really be able to hit the ground running? This is a question from Marianne.

YB  Well I've done as much research as I can fit in at the moment, however, if I was to be elected I would commit everything to this role and I've already said I was studying full time last year and this year I'd be taking on a part time role. I've said I'll be stepping away from my business to concentrate fully on this year so I will give it everything I've got. For now, what I've done is I've looked up- as I said I've never heard of the OU SA so everything has been very new to me and I've learnt a lot just in this two week period.

RA  Yanny Bruere, thank you very much for your time tonight.

YB  Brilliant, thank you Rob.

RA  Thank you.

YB  Thanks.

Interview with Ian Cheyne (via Skype)

RA  How do you feel the President's role fits into the OU Students Association structure and how you feel you'll become a team player?

IC  Well the President's role is ultimately to lead but at the same time, bearing in mind that he or she is part of the team as such, so the President needs to take leadership as and when required but is always a member of the team.

RA  How do you feel you'll be able to get the team gelled behind you and move forward?

IC  I feel that I have the experience within the Association and I have a knowledge of Association affairs and OU matters which give me a good platform to operate from but I also have experience in business and in other areas where I've had to work as part of a team as well as to lead a team and my fundamental approach to that is to be as good a listener if not a better listener than a speaker; I learn more that way.

RA  Speaking of experience, Ian, I mean you've got a real long standing experience with the Students Association attending numerous committee meetings, I think more than 40 over the last few years, so why have you decided that now is the right time for you to stand as President and what new change would you seek to bring?

IC  I've previously referred to the fact that I didn't put myself forward in the past for any of the Milton Keynes bases roles because of the fact I couldn't be sure I could attend all the meetings and I will not take on a responsibility or make a commitment unless I can be certain of that. The situation with me has changed this year in the sense of the availability which has now become, well it's made it possible for me to do that.

As far as the commitment to see things done is concerned, the two specific things I mentioned in my original manifesto one was at the committee level that there are some quite serious issues relating to the nature of reports and discussion of topics and issues which are making the process of discussing these at committee level much more difficult than they should be and they're actually probably taking up more time than they need to, thereby reducing the number of topics which can be dealt with successfully.

I also feel that having experienced the problem of engaging the students in such a way at local level that we can engender the students interest, which in recent times has effectively been given a much stronger role within the university and within higher education generally, I feel that students really should be encouraged to do that but sadly I think that the method of engaging as it's been done in the past has deterred
some students and I feel that the role of the Association at local level should be more of an entrepreneurial role. In other words, encouraging things to happen rather than trying to persuade students to come to the Association and thereby making a commitment which they may feel uncomfortable about at that time.

RA Around a similar point to that but on OU re-design specifically, Ruth and Kath have both asked how will you ensure that you represent the very different and diverse points of view to the university?

IC How can I ensure I represent it, was that your question Rob?

RA Yes. Yes.

IC I can guarantee that I do, as I said before, I am a good listener and I do respect the nature of the wider variety, differences of backgrounds and so on of OU students. My experience with the OU goes back more than 40 years and I’ve seen dramatic changes in that time.

I feel that in meeting students locally in recent years that’s added to my previous experience in that I have met with students from all walks of life and have a much better understanding of not only the true nature of the variations and the differences and the difficulties but to some extent the extent of them as well.

RA Patricia and a few others have asked, on the forums, about candidates experience of the OU in the nations. Now of course you’ve got experience in Scotland but could you tell the folks at home what your knowledge is of the student experience in the other nations, including in England?

IC Fine yeah. Well in 2012, that's more than five years ago, I was elected to the post of the representative from Scotland on what was then the Central Consultative Committee and I attended the meetings from that point on until the committee was eventually disbanded towards the end of 2013. That gave me the experience of working with other students at a central location and a much broader experience of not only students in general but those who were representing students at central level.

Also more recently I took on the role of the Senate Reference Group representative and I've attended eight meetings, I've covered two years there and that again has further enhanced my awareness and my knowledge of what's happening centrally. It also helped me to appreciate the effort which is being put in by those representatives in their various roles within the Association.

RA Ian, thank you very much for your time tonight.

IC Thank you Rob.

RA Thanks.

Interview with Laura Hargreaves

RA I’m back here with Laura Hargreaves, Laura thank you for joining us tonight.

LH Hello. Thank you for having me.

RA Let's start off with the first question, which came in from Kate and she asked what is the most important activity of the President and what equips you to carry it out effectively?
LH Well I’d say in response to that the most important job of the President would be standing up for students interests. I think I outlined in my responses on the forum on how I would aim to stand up for students interests in the concept of OU re-design and I do feel that I’ve got experience from my career background that could be particularly relevant in relation to my experience of working for large organisations in the context of projects with similar aims to the re-design.

RA Your statement particularly talked about the duties of a Charity Trustee, which I know you've expanded on since on the forums but you talked in that about that one of the main duties would be attending committee meetings and reading papers beforehand. Could you perhaps expand on that for people at home to understand what your understanding is of being a Trustee?

LH That's an area that I've done quite a lot of research in preparing for the role and my background research and there were a few documents that I think Peter suggested that were very relevant, they were like government guidelines and such and I also did a bit of my own research to find out the specific role of a Chair and that the Chair has more of a responsibility in ensuring good governance processes are followed and that resources are allocated appropriately and that sort of thing. So yeah, I've done quite a lot of research into the role of a Trustee and the particular things that would be expected if I were to be elected.

RA What do you think are maybe some of the challenges that might come up during the course of this year if you were to be elected that might come into your role as a Trustee, what do you think some of those might be?

LH When considering the role as a Trustee of the university that does bring in a bit of a balancing act and it something that we did discuss during the debate on the forum about there being two, I think they referred to them as 'spheres' really. There's the sphere of engagement and the sphere of representation. I feel that obviously both of those are important and they do feed into each and from my career experience as well I've quite often been leading a more operational team and reporting into a higher level of management so that too I think puts me in a bit of a balancing act between operational and more of a higher level views.

RA Moving away from that and onto OU re-design. Owen and others have asked about the potential cost reductions that have been announced and they're going to be made as part of OU re-design. You've pledged to fight to maintain the core values of the OU so perhaps could you tell us a little bit about what you see to be those core values and what it is around the OU's offer that you really want it to hold onto at the moment?

LH Now this is another thing that I discussed in quite some depth on the forum and if anybody would like further information I would encourage them to go and refer to that because it is quite detailed but in my statement and throughout the campaign I've said that I'd stand up for flexible, personalised education that's accessible to all and they are three really key principles that I do feel are important.

They broadly define the element of student choice and the fact that students feels personally supported in their unique circumstances and also the accessibility question, which relates not only to ensuring that there aren't barriers to groups of protected characteristics to study but also with the context of the OU as an online institution, there is a real concern about web accessibility and with the context of a re-designed interface this will need to be kept in mind from the ground up really throughout the design stages. I feel that's really important.

RA Moving away from that and onto representing students. Jamie asked if candidates had any views on what the Open University can offer to students in Europe and overseas. Now particularly for you as one of the language students and also as a
translator, do you have thoughts on that in terms of what the OU should be offering to students outside the UK's borders?

LH I do have thoughts on that, yes. We discussed it a little bit in a thread and my main thoughts would be that student engagement would be a key thing for overseas students. They obviously aren't as able to attend face-to-face opportunities and in this case I think digital initiatives are going to be really important to try and get these students to feel more involved.

I particularly like the community drop in event that's been run on OU live, I think that's a brilliant idea and that sort of engagement could be really helpful for overseas students I think.

RA Going back to OU re-design and some thoughts around that, which has been a big part of your manifesto discussion so far, where do you think are some of the areas where perhaps the OU could look to make some of those savings that don't impact on the student experience?

LH Throughout my experience of projects similar in context to this it tends to revolve around the move to a shared services kind of model, so this would be support functions such as HR and finance being carried out centrally rather than out across separate business units and this sort of shared approach tends to bring efficiency, it shares best practice so that processes can be improved. I think looking at the OU as a large institution that has historically grown over time, it is possible that a lot of savings could be made by some streamlining and some improvements in efficiency rather than cuts which would affect student experience.

RA Laura Hargreaves, thank you for your time tonight.

LH Thank you very much.

Interview with Billy Hill

RA Welcome back here with Billy Hill. So Billy, thank you for coming along tonight and answering questions.

BH Thank you.

RA Without further ado we will get into the questions that have been asked by students on the forum. Ros and David asked candidates about their understanding of the Association. What do you think is the key function of the President and how will you balance this role with your other commitments?

BH Sure. For me the role of President essentially I think a lot of people misunderstand the role as being sort of the figure head of the organisation. Although that is the main role of the President, to lead it and to lead with the CEC, for me it is about representing students because it's called the Open University Student Association for that reason, for the students, by the students and that's really the fundamental reason behind the Association I feel.

RA And the second part of that question in terms of how you will seek to balance it with your other commitments, how will you seek to do that?

BH I'm very fortunate in the sense where I've got the support from my employer, so I took the decision very seriously to put my nomination through as the President and the first thing that I sought was my employers support or potential non-support and thankfully they are very supportive of the role. So, the one thing I've been very sure to mention on the forum is to make a point that I will be taking a year out of my role within Tesco, which is where I work at the moment.
You were very keen in your manifesto to develop some student discounts and relationships with businesses, so you know that we offer to OU students our NUS extra card, so what would your scheme really add to that at the moment? What do you think would be different?

I'm a member of the NUS scheme as well, I've got an NUS card and it's an absolutely fantastic initiative. For me it's not actually about replacing it entirely or even bringing in a new discount initiative, really what I want to focus on is bringing a unique online aspect, unique to OU students.

So, for example, the Open University students that have an NUS card can't necessarily get a discount on Amazon for a specific book, so where we've got such a big influence - there are 200,000 students in the Association - I really want to work on that influence and work with perhaps more unique employers and see if there's a potential to tap into that more unique online aspect because that's what makes the Open University more unique than any other university because of course I live on the Isle of Wight and for example there's not a Burger King on the Isle of Wight and I'm aware that maybe if you live in the Outer Hebrides there may not be a McDonald's so it's all about tapping into that uniqueness of OU students rather than actually replacing it.

Moving away from that now and onto OU re-design. Owen and David have asked about OU re-design and the planned cost reductions, how will you tackle the issues that are raised by OU re-design?

I've been active on the forum and I've had a look around on the OU re-design forum and I've listened to a lot of the feedback people have given on the OU re-design and to say the least what I will say, I will be honest and say I didn't know everything about the OU re-design before I joined the process but I was very much aware of it and its controversies.

I've been given the opportunity to understand more of those controversies and really what I feel we need to do is we need to ensure that we are representing students and what I've promised and what I've pledged is to ensure that the re-design only benefits students. As the President I won't simply sit back and watch the OU re-design take place if it's going to be a disadvantage to students. For me it's about ensuring that we get the best out of the OU re-design but at the same time we're still standing as an Association and that is to represent the students.

Around representing students, Sheila asked about representing students but with disability. How will you ensure that OU study is fit for all students including those with additional requirements?

Absolutely. The Open University gives many individuals with disabilities to study and do a degree which otherwise they wouldn't have had the opportunity to do. For me one of my initiatives as President I would really like to go round the country, on a monthly basis - that's in my statement - in order to meet students directly and for me that's all about, in my capacity as President, for me that's about involving individuals that can't necessarily go on the train and come to Milton Keynes or attend conference. It's all about growing the Association from within and I'm very much all about the grassroots.

So, what I would say is for anyone that does have a disability if they want a President that's really going to focus on them as individuals then I very much feel I can offer that.

You've mentioned about the monthly events, you also talked about weekly surgeries in your manifesto as well. How will this work? How do you see it working for a student body that is 170,000 students at the moment, spread to the four winds of the UK and
beyond? How do you see that you'll be able to deliver those events? What thoughts have you got around the practical aspects of that?

BH I do like that question, I'm glad you've given me the opportunity to answer that because that is understandably something that students have asked me and of course rightly so it's perhaps a concern for some students. However, what I can say as a local town councillor I am very much in touch and my contact details are more or less available to the whole world. For me providing a monthly - or should I say weekly - surgery is all about being transparent, so giving students the opportunity to speak to me but on an appointment basis. It gives me the control to be able to manage that time effectively and of course that really does ensure that if students do get in contact they have the opportunity to ask me questions directly. For me I want to make sure that people can contact me, whether that's over the phone, via email or even on the Open University forums or Facebook page.

RA Billy Hill, thank you for your time tonight.

BH Thank you.

**Interview with Nicola Simpson**

RA Welcome back and we're here now with Nicola Simpson. Nicci we've got a number of questions to ask you, the first one being you were elected as Deputy President and are the current acting President. Roz asked what's the one most important thing that you have learnt about the role during these past few months?

NS That's a good question from Roz, past President. I think the amount of cooperation that you have to do with other people. I don't think you see that from the outside so both with the other members of the Central Executive team, with the staff and with university staff members. We all know that people are working together but you don't realise just how much and how much of that that takes over each and every single day.

RA Has that changed how you view the role now and how you would view it going into it?

NS I don't think it's changed how I view it, I think I'm more aware of what the challenges are of trying to juggle lots of different projects and lots of different things, with many people different. So, throughout the course of one day you might be speaking to ten different people about ten different issues.

RA Now of course you are already heavily involved with the Student Association and have been for a long period now, what changes would you make if you were elected to this role on a permanent basis? What would be those changes that you would seek to really bring and to make?

NS Honestly I don't think I would actually be making that many changes from what we're already doing. I think the Student Association has gone through a lot of change recently and we always continue to do better, that's something we've done over the last year; I would probably just keep doing more of that.

Obviously everybody has their own ideas about what they would like to do as an individual and something that I brought in last year along with other colleagues was the student voice week. I would like to do that again and explore with other people whether that would be possible but it's more or less speaking to the rest of the team and keep on doing what we're doing.
RA Around OU re-design, David had concerns around some of the plans not enhancing the students experience and if this happens what action do you think the Student Association should or could take in advance of that to try and make sure that the university did it in the right manner?

NS I think we're already trying to do that through the channels that we have open to us, through Student Governance, where students are on committees and being able to speak about different issues. We talk about student experience all the time anyway and I think my message to students would be that OU re-design isn't just one project, it's lots of different things that will change the student experience in many different ways, so there might be some things that we really like and need to tell the university that we support those and where there's evidence that students don't like particular things then we should keep reminding them that we have evidence.

Our model delivery research shows that students prefer certain things in terms of how they want to access their materials, whether that's online or onscreen or as print material. We need to keep reinforcing that message and looking for other ways to engage with students as well on those.

RA What other ways to engage with students do you think we could take?

NS We've already started actually. As the Student Association we created the forum for OU re-design with the Talk To Your Students Association, essentially because there was no other platform for students to talk to us and to the university about those issues. Outside of that I'm trying to encourage the university to speak directly to students and hopefully they will be much more open and honest about where we are in the OU re-design in the future and when decisions are taken that students get to hear about that so that they can make plans for their own student journeys.

RA Around representing students, there's been a lot of questions on the forum about representing different student interests. Patricia and a number of others asked about candidates experience of the OU and particularly in the nations. You've obviously got a lot of experience in Northern Ireland, what would you say is your knowledge or understanding of perhaps how it is in the other UK nations and in continental Europe as well for students?

NS I think that you do know most about the nation that you study in yourself because you've been through that as a student, you get to know what the systems are like, how you enrol, how you get student finance, all of those type of things. For me it's probably been over time building up an awareness of what different nations provide for students, the kind of approaches that they have by speaking to students directly about those experiences but also relying on the other members of the Central Executive who are responsible for looking after their nation.

RA What about different types of student groups as well, so not just in the nations and others but different groups of students and how we represent their needs and how we can make sure their voices are heard as part of OU re-design, what do you see as the future for the Association in those areas of representation?

NS I think there's lots of different reasons that people study so we need to think about why they're studying in the first place and making sure that we have channels to speak with students, so a new group of students potentially for us are apprentices. In the past we haven't really had much engagement with students who have been at partner institutions and now with the new apprenticeship student we'll have to find out ways to really seek out their views and encourage them to feel part of the Student Association community.

Then alongside the different reasons that people study we also have students that study with various different barriers, so students with disabilities and health problems, students who are carers, for students who are parents and for me it's about not
making too many assumptions about what their particular needs are but finding ways to increase dialogue with different groups, either through representative groups or directly with students themselves.

RA  Final question. Ruth, Roz and David have all asked about candidates understanding of the role, what do you now understand about the role of being a Trustee and particularly after chairing the Trustee Board recently?

NS  I think realising that you’re not in charge, that you’re not there to make all the decisions and do everything on your own, that there are four groups of people that you need to think about - there’s the students, there’s the Central Executive Committee, there’s the Trustee group and there’s also the management and staff team. Maybe when you come in as a Trustee first of all you don’t realise just what the balance of all of those different things are.

RA  Nicci Simpson, thank you very much.

NS  Thank you.

Interview with Gerald Barrass (pre-recorded)

RA  Welcome back on the show this evening. Now you’ve heard from all the candidates who could be with us here live tonight. We’ve just got one more to take you through this evening, one more interview to play for you, which is the pre-recorded interview that we did with Gerald Barrass who couldn’t be here today but we recorded an interview with him on Friday and we will play that for you now.

RA  You mentioned in your video that you’ve been involved in community groups and chaired local patients and residents groups, can you tell us a little bit more about that experience please?

GB  Yeah, over a number of years I’ve been like I say accepted as Chair of the residents groups, which involves dealing with residents queries, putting them forward to the housing management and things like that if they’ve got problems and also to get things sorted and if it goes any further, arrange funding and different things like that for it.

RA  We also invited students to ask questions for the event on the forum and Kate posted a question around how would you go about making contacts and building relationships with OU officials?

GB  Well first off I think I’ve responded to that in one of the forums by saying I would contact the via Skype or email or whatever and then make myself known to them and also contacting them on a daily basis if needs be.

RA  How do you think that you could go and talk to the OU, particularly around some of the issues that are going on at the moment given this would be your first role with the Association, is that right?

GB  Yeah I’m involved with student consultation panels and stuff like through email, I’ve also been down and designed some of the courses, down to the OU at Milton Keynes. Me and my wife came down because unfortunately I’m full time carer for my wife you see so I couldn’t leave her here by herself. We came down, did the student consultation because I was going for different things then. I am a member of the Disability Student Group at the OU and like I say I’m on various forums and that. I’ve just finished the access course and I’m starting my under graduate course in October.
Alongside those other commitments that you've got, with starting your degree later this year and having a caring responsibility, coming from the North East, which is quite a trek down to Milton Keynes regularly, how do you think you'd be able to fit in the responsibilities of this post alongside all those other things that you've got going on?

Well basically you've got to make time haven't you because naturally when you're dealing with students and when you're dealing with the faculty and things like that or even with ((inaudible)) you've got to have that specific time put aside. Also, like I say, I schedule my time because I've got someone that comes in and helps us when I'm doing my course work and stuff to schedule my time properly, which naturally includes my disability student allowance that I get and so basically it helps doing that, so I can schedule my time on a good basis so naturally if I have to come down to Milton Keynes say for about three days then I'll schedule my time so I can do course work while I'm still there even though doing the officers job as well.

Is there anything you'd be able to give up do you think to help you do the role?

Well like I say I'm no longer involved with the residents groups so that's one side but the majority of it, you have to give yourself time and see how things go you know. I know there's various different panels and stuff as well that you've got to be sitting on so equally I can schedule my time properly. But like I say the majority of the time I've been told you can do stuff from home but you can use your Skype or you can even use what we're using now you know to discuss things with people on an open basis and you can do it live.

What do you know about the current Central Executive Committee that you would come to Chair if you became President and what skills do you think you bring?

At the moment I don't know that much about it because like I say I've only been involved with the Open Uni for around about coming up to two years but I know that with the different student groups and things like that and also the Association whereby you can go on the forums, deal with your tutors and things. Like I say I'd have to do more investigation to get a fuller understanding of those things and naturally it's like a learning curve isn't it, as you go on you progress further and you get to know what's going on.

What do you think your first month in office would look like if you were elected on August 1st?

I think the first thing would be you'd be looking at all the information that needs to go and to run the office and then getting to know the people round about you and introducing yourself more fully to the students and that so that they can have confidence in talking to you and dealing with their problems. That's the best way to go about things I think, you know, come down, get settled in, introduce myself to the staff or whatever, all my colleagues and then take it from there and see how things go.

As you know and as you've seen on the forum already there's been a lot of discussion about the university recently announced the OU re-design piece of work that's going to be taken forward which is going to bring forward some major changes in terms of massive cuts in expenditure over the next few years and there's been quite a lot of questions around that. One of our students, Kath, wanted to know what issues candidates felt that this raised, what are your thoughts around it?

Well the things is like I say naturally I've said that if it's not broken don't try and fix it but the thing is you've got to look at the perspective of the future. You know funding is getting tight for every organisation so you've got to make sure that you can apply everything in the right way so that you don't take away things that are necessary so that the students don't feel comfortable because you know you've got all these different things going on with Brexit and stuff like that but you need to make sure that
you've got your priorities right towards the Open University because naturally you've got to look at the long term. It's like I'm working for the Housing Management Committee so we've had to look at the long term fees so that's why when we were putting in the funding we had to decide on how much you needed because when they did all this transfer of stock it had to be a major decision because it affected all your tenants so basically you were looking at millions because the council at the time needed over £600m over the next 30 years but we weren't going to get there.

RA Just to interject particularly around OU re-design, there's been a lot of questions from students about how you would represent- The OU student body is so diverse, there are so many different interest and needs and how would you represent disabled students was asked by Sally and Sheila, two students and Patricia asked about how you would represent students in the different nations because they have very different arrangements, how would you-?

GB Like I say I've been on the disability panels for the Housing Management and stuff like that for the housing group, so basically I've got experience of dealing with disability issues so basically I'm on the Disability Student Discussion groups and things like that but I still put things forward. It's like at the moment because my wife's disabled and stuff like that I'm having to fight her case you know and things so I go through all the proper channels and I would go up to the people concerned, I'd take in the views of everybody and then take it to the people who are needy for it and then see what's what and if it didn't come to the right discussion then we'd ask for it to be reviewed and so that we could move it forward rather than having to keep going back over the same issues. Once you start going over the same issues all the time people get a bit monotonous, it gets monotonous doing it.

RA Last question. Why this role and why now? This was particularly asked by a student called Steve.

GB At the moment, like I say naturally I've got certain health issues which means I couldn't do it over a really longer period for the time being so I thought I'll go for it because of my experience of being involved with Chair and different things like that. I know they're a different scenario but the settings whereby I've been involved with management and stuff like that I can talk to people, you know, so it's easier to put peoples views forwards over a short period of time rather than having to wait for like a two year period because if you do it over that time people are going to get ((inaudible?)) of what's happening so that you don't get back to them. It's like with everything, if it's not done now nothing will never get done. You've got to work on your premise that you're going to get the things done within your first year because otherwise once it comes to the second year everything's going to fall flat again.

RA Gerald, thank you for your time and we'll leave it there, thank you.

Group Discussion with Student Association Candidates (Ian Cheyne and Yanny Bruere via Skype)

VR We are back here with the Open University Students Association. We're back here with our candidates who will just introduce themselves and then we'll go straight into questions from you.

JBH Good evening everybody, my name's Joseph Brookes-Harmer.

BH Hello everybody, I'm Billy Hill.

LH Hi everybody, I'm Laura Hargreaves.

NS Hi there, I'm Nicola Simpson.

IC Hello, it's Ian Cheyne here
Hi everyone, I'm Yanny Bruere

Thank you very much, welcome everybody. This is, as we spoke about earlier, is the questions from our lovely listeners who have been feverishly talking about the events here this evening and I'll start with yourself, Jo. Rachel has asked, because this is a full time role, what will your availability be in the evenings and weekends?

My availability will be full time, it will be a full time position. It's not something that I would certainly not take lightly and I think at the end of the day it would be a fantastic opportunity for me and I'm more than ready to step up to the role for the students of the Open University.

So you will be available evenings and weekends?

Absolutely.

Okay great. One for you Yanny. Jenny and David have asked, in your first week how would you go about learning more about the Association?

Well I think Rob obviously mentioned the full induction. Even before the first week, after the results are announced I think the work begins there. Before the position officially commences I think a lot of work needs to be done in between that period as well, just to grease the wheels and get ready to hit the ground running.

Okay great, thank you. Ian, a question from David. How will you engage more students to contribute to OU re-design?

Secure students to contribute to OU re-design?

That's right.

Well first of all we have to get more students to take an interest in the proceedings and that's the real $64,000 question. I have proposed ((inaudible?)) of trying to encourage students to engage more other than putting them into uncomfortable positions or feeling that they have to commit to some kind of duties or function with the Association. I feel that we need to encourage students to respond without feeling that they lack commitment.

Okay great. Laura, over to you. What is the first action you would take on OU re-design if elected? So along the same sort of trail but just asking about what you would personally do with in terms of ((inaudible?))

First of all I would look to liaise with the members of the CEC team to make sure that we were in agreement on our position on OU re-design because I think it's really important for a united front from the Association but following that I would aim to make my position clear to the university as well from the outset, about the particular things that I would be defending and then throughout the course of the term I'd be looking to implement robust ways for students to be involved in the project throughout.

Okay great. Billy, one for you from Sheila. Have you taken the cost impact of travelling around the country to meet students into consideration?

I absolutely have and I really feel that although there is a cost with anything in terms of travelling around the country really essentially what I want to do as the President is more or less build the Association locally. So, for me, it's also about bringing events within local communities, within local towns to strengthen the Association but more for me I suppose I want to play an active role in being in those local areas and being in those local meet ups as much as possible because I think it's really important that we have a President that does that. We do need to make sure we consider the cost
and that's one thing I have borne in mind and that's why for me it is more about actually meetings students at the meet ups and arranging more meet ups equally as much as it is attending or generating sort of events, for example, in a local café. It's equally about bringing in new events as well as building existing ones.

VR Have you been to any of these meet up?

BH I'm not, no, because I'm on the Isle of Wight it's very difficult for me to actually get to a meet up and that's really something I want to focus on and that's why for me as President I really want to make sure that local meet ups and local sort of events where you can meet with fellow like-minded OU students really does build up from the grassroots upwards because for me on the Isle of Wight, at the moment there isn't really anything active locally so that's really what I want to do and I'm sure that's an experience that OU students have had across the country. I'm aware from what I've seen on forums and on groups it's very much been about building it up locally, building it up nationally as well so that's very much what I'm about. So yes there is a cost involved but essentially what I really want to emphasise is we need to ensure that we're sensible with that, you know, that we're bearing the budget in mind and, of course, making it local so ensuring that, as I was saying earlier I mentioned the Outer Hebrides, people that are further away and further out in the country I think they need to have an element of feeling like there is a stronger sense of security and a form of Association where they are.

VR Okay great, thanks. Ian and Yanny, just to let you know that we've just been muting our microphones during the questions because we're getting a bit of feedback so if we do go quiet I do apologise, we will buzz you back in as soon as we can.

YB Okay.

IC The sound is extremely distorted from the other candidates, I can't make out anything said at all.

VR Okay we'll see if we can fix it but we'll carry on for now. Keep calm and carry on. Nicci, a question for you. Sheila was talking about how the job is quite a complex one and she wanted to know what do you perceive as the biggest differences between becoming President of the Association as opposed to Deputy President?

NS Well that's a really good question. I guess one of the main differences is the Council rule, so as President you're a member of the OU Council so you're bringing student views to Council and you're meeting with members of the university community but also external members of Council who come from a whole range of different backgrounds and that's something that the Deputy President wouldn't be doing. There's a level of confidentiality with Council that you don't have to encounter in many other spaces, a little bit with Senate but not quite to the same extent, so that's probably one of the differences.

VR Is it something that you've picked up recently?

NS I was really lucky as acting President to be invited to be on Council along with our Student Council member there and I guess when I went into it I thought it was going to be a particular thing, I thought it was going to be a very scary environment to go into and I thought I'm going to be this little student sitting in a room with very high powered people but actually the experience has been really quite welcoming and the view of the student was so important in that process; expectations and reality were somewhat different.

VR Okay great, thanks. We've got some questions to everybody that I will ask each individual to respond to and then we'll take it in turns and you can feel free to respond to the previous speaker's comment if you wish to.
Have you heard of the Student Charity - the OU Student Education Trust, OUSET it's known as - and what is your understanding of what it does for students? I'll go to you first Jo.

JBH Yes certainly so I have indeed heard of OUSET, it's a very good way to communicate with fellow students. The great thing about the Open University is it's a very charitable organisation, that's the fantastic thing about the Open University, as well as learning we put charity at the forefront so really about the charity in mind, it is bringing the best forward to the Open University and bringing it forward.

VR Okay, Billy if you'd like to comment on what you know about OUSET?

BH Sure. I'm vaguely familiar with OUSET, I'm not going to claim to be a knowledge bank of it but I am, I believe, comfortably familiar with the role it plays and that is to help students in hardship. So if they have financial difficulties my understanding is that OUSET is very much there to help students that are struggling, so to help perhaps with funding their studies, be that to perhaps buy some new books or aid their studying in some way or maybe even my understanding as well to pay the bills. Obviously, undoubtedly, if a student is struggling to pay the bills it is going to affect their study, so it's there really to support students in need. One of the reasons why I really feel I will enjoy the role of being President is because the President has the opportunity to be a Trustee on that Board so you really get to have a direct influence in terms of where that money goes and you get to look at individual cases as far as I'm aware. That, for me, is my understanding and for me personally I've been lucky enough not to rely on OUSET but I really feel that it's there for those in need so absolutely.

VR Ian would you like to make any comments on OUSET, perhaps in terms of, I know Billy's spoken a lot about what OUSET does and who it's for but perhaps you might be able to comment on what you might be able to influence or what you hope to influence as a Trustee of OUSET?

IC OUSET does an outstanding job of providing an outstanding facility for all those students who need it. It's highly regretful that the funding is limited and consequently the number of students who could benefit in any single year is also limited. On the good side OUSET is a very straightforward procedure and it's something which I know from other areas of experience the concerns that people express when they're looking for help, perhaps a sense of embarrassment or feeling like that. OUSET works very easily, very swiftly and makes the whole process of getting funding, financial support that much easier.

What I would want to work towards if I were elected President, is to look at ways of increasing the funding. I have been involved ((inaudible?)) as I mentioned previously there is a fund raising exercise in September this year but I'd like to explore ways of actually increasing that funding because that's the real limitation and that's the sad part of it that OUSET is unable to help more students.

VR Great, thank you. Yanny same question to you. If you were successful and became a Trustee of OUSET what do you think you'd like to influence?

YB Obviously it's a really good initiative that's started up. What I'd like to do is to find more creative ways of raising funds. I think there's loads of things you could be doing. We need to focus on bigger opportunities and bigger ways to raise that money and create more awareness at the same time. I think it's maybe a little bit limited at the moment, as Ian touched on, and it's probably focusing on smaller gift requisition income and that's something we need to explore.

VR Great, thank you. Laura, the same question to you please.
LH So to me OUSET's very important in the context of education that's accessible to all. I think that it plays a really important role in showing that students who are facing financial hardship don't face a barrier to studying at the OU. I'd certainly agree with what some of the other candidates have said, that it would be nice to see some more large scale fundraising events, I think particularly something that could maybe be publicised online and get students involved remotely without the need for any sort of face-to-face, travel etc would be quite a good idea and it would be nice to explore some more fundraising ideas really.

VR Great, thank you. And Nicci, last but not least, same question please.

NS The OU Students Educational Trust, so it does indeed support students that are in financial hardship, there is a set of quite strict criteria on the website and students can find out more information about the Trust on our Student Association website.

What I would like to do over the next year is to work with Trustees and Student Support in particular, who does have responsibility for looking after fundraising aspects, to try and do some fundraising initiatives. Not so much actually about raising the funds that are there in the pot, because actually at the minute there is a substantial sum of money available for students but one of the biggest challenges I understand that OUSET have is that not many students are actually aware of OUSET and what it can do for them. To me a fundraising exercise is a big part of the awareness drive, so that students out there actually know and the type of things that we could explore as a team would be around big events like the London Marathon. How many charities don't have people running a marathon these days? There's lots of ideas that we could explore there.

VR Just to go along the same trail, so we'll do the same sort of question spiel again but what would you do as President to help increase the awareness of the Students Association? Over to Jo first.

JBH When it comes to a special awareness I would gather all possible and available information and really head home towards how special the event we have, so really with the Open University we can raise awareness through our own sources, we have a network of hundreds of thousands of students and I think at the end of the day that can be used as the lifeline to the actual OUSET.

VR How are you going to increase that awareness through the students?

JBH By contacting students, making them aware. We could do a huge marketing campaign and I think really it's just a case of bringing that home as to how important it is, keeping it short and sweet.

VR Great, thank you. Billy?

BH This is the Association now, moving on from OUSET?

VR Yes. OUSET comes under the Association so any awareness is good.

BH Sure. I think in a way that does sort of tie in because it's all about involving the students and that's one thing that OUSET obviously does, it's students that raise the money and it's students that work together to help other students and I that's really what we need to do with the Association on a wider basis.

For me it's all about tapping into social media, building on what we've got within social media. I've been posting videos on the various groups connected to the Association, the various regional groups, updating people on my campaign and I've noticed already one of the videos, the last time I checked, had 500 views so we have a really good, thriving social media already and for me it's all about tapping into that. I personally feel that, for example something like this live event, I think we need more
of this because it involves everyone from around the world regardless of where they are. I'm sure we've had a lot of students that are on the bus that have participated tonight.

VR Have you considered that 500 out of 200,000 students isn't that many and that those that are going to be tuning now are our engaged students, we need to create better awareness for those that aren't currently engaged with us?

BH Absolutely and of course that's one of the things I really want to tackle. One of my initiatives that I would like to pursue if I'm fortunate enough to be elected is to send a direct monthly email out to each and every student and of course there's only so much we can do to ensure that people do participate, but for me in my capacity as a town councillor I certainly understand that voters expect you to go to them because they see you as the person responsible to deal with their issues and they expect you to go to them. When I have to deal with issues or when I'm required to deal with issues or understand what people think then I'm required to have a hands on approach and I feel that's really what we need.

My legacy, I hope, as President, well as I've said throughout, is to be a President for everyone and I want to ensure by doing that that I have a hands on approach that I sort of metaphorically so-to-speak meet people on the doorstep and that's what I feel we need more of, to ensure we get out to every single voter.

VR Thank you. Ian if I can ask you the same question, what would you do to increase awareness of the Students Association if elected?

IC Okay. I didn't hear the last candidates response but anyway.

Essentially there have been ongoing initiatives in recent times such those things even looked to be held on Facebook, there have been meet and greet arrangements, in Scotland as part of the Scotland Assembly Executive we have taken the opportunity to meet and greet students at OU skill workshops and that kind of thing and every opportunity to meet students ((inaudible?)) should be seized on.

And it's not an 'if' or 'but' here it's simply a way of using what we have learned at those functions or through those activities in the best way possible. I know that in Scotland we used to operate a forum based activity called Feedback Forum and that was simply providing topics for students which we felt were relevant for them to respond to and we noticed through that if we glean as much information and as much feedback at these or during these events what we can then do is what I feel is the most important aspect of engaging the students effectively and that is by seizing the moment. In other words whatever captures the imagination of students at a particular time we should capitalise on that and use that and many of those because I would expect there to be a series of them, in a more organised way and I do feel ((inaudible)) chance of increasing student engagement.

VR I'll just do a quick follow up question. How do you plan on identifying those 'seizing of moments', what moments, how are you going to recognise those when they come up?

IC Well I can give you an example of something which did prove quite effective was about five years or so ago the issue of online delivery was being debated, as is still being debated, and we operated a Feedback Forum on that particular subject and we were able to use that information to present some education to the ((O&E?)) of how the students felt about the issue itself.

VR Great, thank you. Laura over to you, what would you do to increase awareness of the Association?
LH First of all I think the election process itself has probably done a lot to increase awareness of an interest in the Association and I think as future elections take place that should continue as well.

I also think that some really important initiatives already underway, that are already being implemented by members of the existing CEC team. For example the community drop in event on OU live, that's a really valuable way for students to engage with each other. Also there's a new Facebook group that's just recently been created as well as the Grassroots Project, which gives students a lot more opportunities to get involved, especially at a local level and I think that might be really valuable for those students who haven't got involved in the Association before perhaps where they could maybe take on this role and become an Association ambassador - not a confirmed terminology yet I believe.

So yeah, there's some exiting things already in the pipeline and if elected I'd be looking to work with the CEC team to establish where we are with what's currently being discussed and if there are any further ideas for developing this more.

VR Great and Nicci over to you, the same question.

NS Just building on those points that are made, the Association has been aware that there is an awareness issue, I myself didn't learn about the Association and didn't get involved in the Association until I was a bit further into my student journey and I wish I'd discovered the Student Association much earlier than I had.

But I think beyond students there's also an issue of raising awareness with the staff at the university who sometimes don't know very much about our work and last year we tried to create some awareness activities with staff members around Student Voice and we created the Student Voice Week which has been a really invaluable experience for me because you're getting out and meeting other staff members, who already have an insight a little bit and want to get involved with students and find ways to get them engaged but aren't quite sure exactly how to do that. So, it's enabling conversations with members of staff.

The third group that I think we need to build awareness with are actually outside of the university, with the general public and with our politicians and those people outside of the institution who are making decisions in the higher education sector that directly affect what the OU can provide to OU students. If we were to do all of those things, a little bit more awareness in the public realm, a bit of noise in the public realm would mean that when students start with the OU they know about the Student Association already and that the things that we're talking about in two or three of those groups will be the same message: We're essentially reminding people the Student Association is, who student members are and what we need.

VR Great thank you. We've lost Yanny so we're just trying to get hold of him but we'll move on and then we'll come back to him if we can get him back again.

Final question you'll be pleased to know for this evening. What would you most enjoy about being President and what do you think would be the biggest challenge? Let's go backwards, let's start with Nicci.

NS The biggest enjoyment for me is meeting other people. I have met more people through the OU and through the Students Association than I have in any other part of my life to date and it's such a diverse student body that I have met people that I probably wouldn't have encountered in my everyday life so that's been really special and the friendships that you make are really special. Of course the work and the role is really important but the things that you take away personally mean a lot to you.

And the second part, was it around the challenge?
VR The challenge. What do you think the biggest challenge would be?

NS Well I know the biggest challenge for me is something I referred to earlier is having your finger on the pulse of all those different pies and all those different things that are happening all the time and being able to switch from speaking to the Vice Chancellor about an issue to speaking to a student about something else totally different and organising a meet up one day and the next day sitting down to organise and decide what's going to be on the Consultation Forum. So, there's a real kind of diversity of things that you're having to do in the role.

VR Okay great. Laura, same question.

LH For myself I guess it would be similar points to Nicci. I also only got involved with the Student Association pretty late in my student journey and I also wish I got involved earlier so to me it would be great to be more involved with the university community, to get more deeply involved in particular areas.

In terms of the challenges, I've said this quite a few times in the forum, so much so that people have noticed but I do appreciate that there will be a steep learning curve for this role, particularly for somebody who was coming outside of the current CEC team. I feel like this would be an area where the key challenge would be as well, as Nicci says, there's quite a lot of aspects to the role so it would be being able to hit the ground running in all of these different aspects of the role, with the relevant background knowledge.

VR You said you'd have liked to have got involved with more initiatives with the Association, do you want to expand on that? What were those initiatives that you think that you might have missed out on?

LH Well basically I've been studying with the OU for five years and I volunteered as a central rep in my final year but when I volunteered I saw all these exciting things that were happening such as the Grassroots Project and things like that and that in particular is right up my street. I think grassroots engagement of students as ambassadors for the Association, that's a great idea and that's certainly an area that I would have liked to have been more involved with.

VR I was on that project team so obviously I'm really pleased that you said that.

IC Right. Let me deal with the challenge first of all. I think the biggest challenge is coming in at a time when there is what is quite clearly a deteriorating service within the OU and that this deterioration needs to be stopped as quickly and as effectively as possible. That is a challenge that is quite considerable. But I was denied the opportunity to carry on to university because of a teacher at my secondary school so the OU has given me an opportunity, a second chance if you like to do that and I've achieved that. I do get a great sense of satisfaction and pleasure, genuine pleasure out of helping other people and I feel that I would get in the process of being in a position to be able to help more people.

VR Great and what will you most enjoy?

IC I think the thing I would most enjoy is seeing at least the beginnings of what I feel is the thing that's been lacking all along within the OU and that is a genuine OU community. There is a Students Association community which has been very (inaudible?) over the years. I would like to see a real growing community and that's the thing- and that would provide students with not only the sense of achievement in academic terms but a sense of something which they can be proud of, as a memory that will carry on into their relative mature years such as I have at the moment.
Okay great, thank you very much. Yanny good to have you back with us. I'm just going to finish this string of questions and then I'm going to come back to you and I've got two questions for you.

Billy if we can go over to you, what you will most enjoy do you think about being President and what the biggest challenge will be?

Sure. The thing that I'm most looking forward to if I'm lucky enough to be elected, if the electorate give me that opportunity, is to give every student a chance to thrive under the Association because one thing- I've been asking the forum about my career potential or whatever or what I want to do. I'm not interested in being a politician, I want to be a teacher and the reason why I want to be a teacher is because I want to give everyone an opportunity. I didn't come from a millionaire background and the OU has given me an opportunity to really thrive. So for me it's having a direct influence. Being able to work from within, to give individuals that hold key responsibility within the Open University to be able to speak to them and give students an opportunity and work with students in order to bring those opportunities. One of the initiatives I really am looking forward to doing, and this is one thing I would like to do in my first week of being elected, is to speak directly to employers to see what opportunities there are potentially for students to take potentially paid or unpaid internships. I'm really looking to providing an exciting new dynamic journey with students and I hope they join with me on that exciting journey.

In terms of the challenges, of course we do have a big issue at the moment, which is the OU re-design. For me that is ultimately the biggest problem that we have to move forward on together as an Association and we need to ensure that we move forward in a steady direction. So, we need to make sure that we're making proper decisions, that we're thinking thoroughly about what we want to take for example to council meetings in terms of feedback. So for me it's about getting that feedback on the OU re-design and ensuring that inevitably what happens, I'm hoping in my leadership, is that I come in and it's the biggest problem but I leave and it's no longer a problem, that's really the legacy I'd like to leave.

You talked about helping students career wise, potentially discussing with other partnerships, with other businesses. Can you think of any teams within the Association or the wider OU that you might work with in doing that?

Within the Open University there's so many sort of branches but I think first and foremost really it comes down to marketing initially because what we need to do is we need to ensure that we show just what the Open University can offer. I'm a regular listener on the radio and at the moment the OU are pushing out the apprenticeship degree programme and of course that ultimately comes through working with employers. So we need to first of all begin at the very foundation of getting these opportunities is to really get that out there with employers and ensure that people are aware of it. Like with anything, of course, it is inevitably a gain for students so we need to ensure that we work with employers and the only way we can do that is by advertising the potential opportunities for employers to work with OU students because us as OU students we have so many unique circumstances around us and so many unique life opportunities to offer I think it's undeniable to say it's a great opportunity out there for employers to take on.

Okay great, thank you. Jo over to you, what do you envisage as being something that you enjoy most about being President, if elected, and what do you think your biggest challenge will be?

Well I think building on this terrific evening we've had here, listening to my other candidates, I'm going to take it through to a slightly different tone with me and that's going to be a much more individualised and personalised tone.
So for me about the Open University I think the biggest moment of fun and the most thing I would enjoy, the single element would be simply to serve all of the humble people of the Open University - that includes staff, students and outsiders. So the main basis for me is with the Open University, the more people that we can get on our side by utilising the available resources we have, simply bringing everything together that we have heard. I really think we're onto a successful start. I mean in terms of the way the Open University operates now there is definite room for improvements of course, like any organisation. But I think from an Open University perspective we all see a little part of the Open University in us each and every day, whether you're a student or not, if you're travelling or if you're commuting for example you will have major train stations that have bill boards and it's really striking the right tone with people. So for me it's about having the fun with everybody. It's working hard, having fun and not putting anybody's leadership campaign into the side if you want a strong and a very stable leadership from myself, then that would be the ideal way to go.

On the other side though if we're looking at challenges, however, I think the biggest challenge for me would be knowing that we never have enough time in the day to sort things out. However, if you're looking at it from this perspective and on a parting remark from me, we'll never be able to help every single person, however, all of our skills we can help somebody.

VR Okay great, thank you. If I can go to Yanny, sorry I have two questions for you just to wrap up. The first one is what you would do if elected as President to increase awareness of the Students Association?

YB Well I think the ((inaudible?)) it comes back to that engagement issue again, of getting people involved. To really raise awareness, you know they always say the best form of communication or best form of advertising is wake them up. So getting more people involved and then letting them spread the word. So things like open days, I think we should have more open days and invite students down to get into face-to-face contact with students and not just physically but also on camera, on Periscope, on YouTube and get people engaged.

VR Okay great, thank you. The final question for this evening and no pressure but you'll be the last one answering, what do you think you will most enjoy if elected as President and what do you think will be your biggest challenge?

YB I think just helping students would be the thing I enjoy the most, just having the satisfaction and the knowledge that you're helping people. ((inaudible?)) improve their education, improve their life, improve their studies, making it an easier place for people to come and to improve themselves, to best themselves as people.

The biggest challenge undoubtedly is going to be OU re-design. I really think we need to have someone tough and uncompromising who can stand up the OU initial guys and really represent the views of the students and what they want.

VR Okay great thank you very much to each and every one of you that's taken the time out of your evening to be here. Thank you for answering all the questions and best of luck to everybody.