Comprehensive Guide to the OUSA Forum Service
OUSA PUBLIC FORUMS “AT A GLANCE”

This is a brief guide to OUSA’s service. It will probably be sufficient for the majority of those who use our service. However, there is also a Comprehensive Guide which you may want to refer to in a variety of circumstances.

1. OUSA public forums are open to all those with access to the University’s online learning systems regardless of their membership status with OUSA

2. OUSA is the Students Association and prides itself on the fact that all these forums are moderated by students and ultimately controlled by the Association’s elected student representatives

3. None of the OUSA forums are part of the academic provision of the University although thousands of students who use them feel that they add enormous value to the experience of being an OU student

4. All the students involved in providing this service, from Moderators through to the OUSA President, are unpaid volunteers

5. All users of our forums are required to abide by the University’s Student Computing Code of Conduct and online communications systems guidelines which can be found at http://www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/codes/guidelines.html

6. All otherwise unqualified references to ‘the rules’ are references to the details found within these University documents.

7. All our forums have a Spirit of Forum and those contributing to any particular forum are expected to contribute in line with its rules.

8. We have a Complaints Procedure and a Disciplinary Procedure which are set out in full in the Comprehensive Guide to the Service
Our commitment to those who use our service is:-

We aim to:-

- treat all users of our service fairly and give clear information about your rights to challenge our decisions
- be impartial in dealing with complaints or considering disciplinary action
- follow the procedure for dealing with complaints

We will not tolerate users of our services:-

- who refuse to operate within the rules
- who abuse Moderators, staff or elected representatives for carrying out their responsibilities within our procedures
- who are deliberately trying to disrupt the service

… and finally

if you want to challenge any aspect of the way we run this service, please do refer to our Comprehensive Guide first.
OU SA  PUBLIC FORUMS
A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE SERVICE

SECTION A - THE BASIS OF OUR SERVICE

1. Spirit of OUSA Forums

a. The Open University’s online learning systems are part of the academic provision of the University intended to aid study. OUSA achieved a considerable benefit for students by persuading the University to allow us to have a presence on the system and provide a service on a much wider basis in line with our aims and objectives of fostering a corporate identity for all students and co-ordinating social and welfare activities. Over the years that service has grown to include a huge range of forums spanning the spectrum from the serious and study related to the frivolous and fun. Our agreement with the University lets us provide a service that is used and enjoyed by tens of thousands of students across the University every year. OUSA is rightly proud of this service and we want to be able to carry on providing this facility which enhances the quality of life for many of our members.

b. The continuation of this service depends on our ability to show the University that we are capable of running the service efficiently, not putting the University’s interests at risk, and not placing undue demands on their resources. Ultimately the President of OUSA is personally responsible to the University for ensuring that OUSA fulfils these responsibilities. OUSA President is also responsible to our members and to OUSA Conference for safeguarding the
provision of this service. For that reason OUSA President is the ultimate authority behind this service.

c. The Students Association exists because of a belief that students have a right to some independence within the University. When providing the OUSA forums, we determined that these facilities should be run for students by students. We pride ourselves on the fact that all those with access to the O U’s online learning systems are welcome to use our facilities, but all OUSA forums are moderated by students themselves.

d. OUSA therefore calls upon everyone who uses the OUSA forums, students, staff and University guests, to respect and honour this degree of independence we have achieved for students and to protect its continuation by participating in line with the Spirit of OUSA Forums. We especially ask that you respect and co-operate with our student Moderators, the OUSA staff who operate the OUSA Controller identity and the elected student representatives and President who head our organisation. We also ask that you follow the advice and guidance contained in this Guide to our Forum service.

e. Participants in OUSA’s online public forums should be aware that they are open to students under the age of 18, who are able to access them with parental guidance / approval. On this basis, there may be occasions when contributors to the forums encounter messages containing words and expressions that might be more characteristic of one of our younger OUSA members and this should be taken into account when reacting or responding to the message.
2. Management of the Service

a. A combination of appointed and elected students take the main responsibility for running our forums. Our appointed student Moderators (Mods) have the primary responsibility for the day to day management of our forums. Senior elected representatives from the Central Executive Committee (C E C) are directly responsible to the President for the overall discipline and control of this OUSA service. As in other areas of OUSA activity, our student volunteers are supported by limited staff resources from OUSA’s central office.

b. You will be able to identify the Mods of a particular forum by looking at the Spirit of Forum which will be posted at the top of the forum. This will list the Moderators for that forum. OUSA Controller will always be operated by OUSA staff and at the current time, the Manager responsible for this service is Wendy Burrell, Assistant General Manager (Student Services). The senior, elected representatives from the C E C responsible for this service are collectively known as the Controller Advisory Panel (CAP) which is chaired by the President’s nominee. The current membership of CAP will be published as appendix I to these Guidelines. Any matter that needs to be determined about the provision of this service and which has not been covered in this guide will be determined by CAP on the authority of the OUSA President. No member of CAP should be contacted privately to discuss any matter which is under consideration by the panel. Any correspondence for CAP should be addressed to the OUSA Controller’s mailbox ousa-controller@open.ac.uk

c. Given the size of the service and the tens of thousands of regular users of our forums, it is astonishing how smoothly everything operates. Much credit is due to our Moderators, most of whom are extremely conscientious and
accommodating. The overwhelming majority of those using our forums need relatively little direction on how to behave and are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities for making friends, getting some peer support or giving a bit of help to others in need. Unfortunately, when we do have problems, either in certain forums, or with a very small number of contributors, these can escalate out of all proportion. They can swamp the limited resources we have for managing the service, cause considerable stress and distress for those managing the service, spill over to the University and threaten our ability to continue providing this service.

d. We are determined to manage these problems effectively. We do not think it appropriate that a service which gives pleasure to many thousands of students should be at risk from a tiny number of service users. This Guide includes full details of the procedures which we have adopted for managing all aspects of our public forums. However, we also feel that it may be helpful to explain the key principles on which we have based our service:-

We aim to:-

- treat all users of our service fairly and give clear information about your rights to challenge our decisions
- be impartial in dealing with complaints or considering disciplinary action
- follow the procedures for dealing with complaints

We will not tolerate users of our services:-

- who refuse to operate within the rules
- who abuse Moderators, staff or elected representatives for carrying out their responsibilities
- who are deliberately trying to disrupt the service
In the day to day management of the forums, our aim is to provide a balance between the rights of the individual and the service to the majority.

From experience we know there are the odd occasions when significant OUSA resource is spent managing a local dispute or disagreement. Although we want to encourage good quality discussion and, where appropriate, robust debate - and we don’t want to censor too heavily or step in unnecessarily – we do have an obligation to ensure that the rules are adhered to and we take this responsibility very seriously.

We also witness the occasional clash of personalities where individuals will never see eye to eye; battle lines are drawn and all reason can go out of the window. We will deal with these instances with common sense and fairness – and we’ll work hard to understand where the problems lie – but in no way can we act as a court of law and any judgements will be made on the balance of probabilities.

We are proud that OUSA online forums are managed for the greatest part by students for students and without this input from our volunteer moderators, the service would be severely diminished. The OUSA Controller providing the backup for moderators is only in place during Office hours and there has been the odd instance where advantage has been taken of this to cause a problem for moderators within a forum.
As you might imagine, any behaviour in this respect would be treated as a serious breech of the rules.

We ask that users of the service understand these principles.
SECTION B  COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

1. Introduction

a. OUSA public forums are those OUSA forums open to everyone with access to the University’s computing services. The University allows OUSA to run this service on the basis that OUSA takes responsibility for ensuring that the University’s Student Computing Code of Conduct and online communication systems guidelines are adhered to and where necessary enforced. Details can be found at: (http://www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/codes/guidelines.html)

b. All users of OUSA forums must familiarise themselves with the contents of these documents and operate within the stated rules. For all purposes relating to OUSA’s Forums, references to ‘the rules’ means those specified within the documents referred to above. Where users of our services fall short of the conduct required we will limit or terminate their use of our services.

c. These Procedures explain:-

- what to do if you feel another user is in breach of the rules
- how breaches of the rules are dealt with
- what action you can take if you believe that you have been treated unfairly.

d. In order to avoid contradictions or inconsistency in our treatment of members in relation to conduct on-line as opposed to conduct in general, these are the only procedures which will apply to conduct in OUSA forums. We therefore indicate at appropriate places in this Complaints
Procedure how it has incorporated the provisions of The OUSA Harassment Policy and Associated Procedure (HPAP). We also indicate in this Disciplinary Procedure how it has incorporated the provisions of The OUSA Disciplinary Procedure.

e. Where CAP (Controller Advisory Panel) is considering matters formally referred to it under these procedures, not less than two members of CAP will be involved and all decisions will be made on behalf of CAP collectively. If it is necessary for any matter dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure to be considered by an Appeal Panel of the Central Executive Committee (CEC), no member of CAP will form part of that Appeal Panel.

f. It is not acceptable to try to bypass these procedures by writing directly to the individual mailboxes of the President or other members of the CEC. We will not enter into private discussions on matters which are, or which ought properly to be, the subject of these procedures.

2. Complaints Procedure

a. Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure

In the first instance any complaint about conduct in an OUSA forum should be taken up with the Moderators (Mods) of the forum concerned. Where appropriate this will constitute action at Level 2 of the HPAP. You should receive a response within 48 hours of submitting your complaint, but not necessarily have your complaint resolved in that time.

Following a response from the Mod(s) if you remain dissatisfied, you may raise your complaint under Stage 2 of the procedure.
b. Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure

If you have a complaint about OUSA forum Mod(s), or you remain dissatisfied after raising a complaint with them, you may submit a formal complaint to the OUSA Controller who can be contacted at ousa-controller@open.ac.uk. Where appropriate this will constitute action at Level 3 of the H P A P. You will receive an automated acknowledgement to confirm that your message been received.

You should be precise about the nature of your complaint and you will need to cite details of the message(s) about which you are complaining giving the name of the forum, the subject thread, name of poster and time of posting. You may use quotes from messages to help explain your complaint but this will not be a substitute for providing the full details of where the message(s) can be found.

OUSA Complaints is managed by staff at the OUSA Office through the OUSA Controller id. If a senior member of OUSA staff is satisfied that your complaint is relatively straightforward and can be handled at that level, you will receive a response within 5 working days. If the judgement of staff is that the matter is more complex or could require serious disciplinary action it will be referred to CAP at Stage 3 of the procedure. You will receive confirmation that this is how your complaint is to be dealt with within 5 working days.

If you have received a response to your complaint from a member of staff under Stage 2 of the procedure but you are not satisfied with that response, you may raise your complaint at Stage 3 of the procedure.

c. Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure

Where a senior member of OUSA staff judges your complaint to be complex and/or potentially requiring serious disciplinary action, or where you remain unhappy following receipt of a response from a member of staff under Stage 2 of the procedure, the matter will be
considered by a panel of not less than three members of CAP. Where appropriate this will constitute action at Level 4 of the H P A P.

Where a complaint is being referred to Stage 3 by a senior member of OUSA staff s/he will make such other enquiries as are necessary in order to provide the panel of C E C members with as much relevant information as possible. Where you are raising a complaint at Stage 3 of the procedure, this should be sent to the OUSA Controller with the subject title ‘Stage 3’. You can assume that the original dialogue concerning your complaint at Stage 2 will automatically be referred to the CAP but you should provide a clear and concise explanation of why you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and what outcome you want the CAP to provide.

You will receive a response within 15 working days. If for any reason it is not possible to give you a full response to your complaint within 15 working days, then you will be informed of the delay by the OUSA Controller and receive an indication of when you can expect a full response.

If your complaint is not upheld you will be given an explanation of the decision.

The decision of CAP will be final as far as OUSA’s Complaints Procedure is concerned. However if you believe that OUSA has failed to comply with or uphold the University’s Student Code of Computing Conduct or the Online systems guidelines, or has not acted in accordance with its own stated procedures, then you do have the right to submit a complaint under the University’s Complaints Procedure which can be accessed from the following area: http://www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/codes/guidelines..html

You will be expected to provide the University with evidence of where OUSA has failed.
3. Disciplinary Procedure

a. Introduction

Where OUSA has evidence that a user of our forums is not complying with the rules we will attempt to resolve any problems by informal means. However, where it appears to us that the conduct concerned is serious or deliberate, then we shall not hesitate to use the formal disciplinary procedure.

Please be aware that the Students Association only has jurisdiction over the activity on the OUSA online forums and cannot deal with problems that occur in other areas of the Open University’s Online Teaching services. These should be referred to Forum moderators if appropriate or alternatively complaints should be made in writing to complaints-appeals@open.ac.uk providing the detail of where the problem is occurring and these will be directed to the administrators concerned.

For areas outside of the University's service, for example Facebook or Twitter, complaints should be addressed to the relevant system administrator.

Whilst the initial stages of this Disciplinary Procedure have been specifically tailored to deal with conduct in our on-line forums, the latter stages comprise The OUSA Disciplinary Procedure covering the conduct of all OUSA members in all situations.

Similarly, if it is deemed necessary by a senior staff member, or the Deputy President (or nominated Deputy in her/his absence) with the support of two fellow members of the CAP team, a contributor may have their access temporarily suspended or modified, without prejudice to the outcome until an investigation, which might include an appeal has been concluded. This is to allow for unacceptable conduct on-line to be treated on an equal footing with unacceptable conduct in any other situation. In the case of users of our services who are not OUSA members, where we find it necessary to exclude
such users from our services, we will report our findings on their conduct to the University.

b. Informal Action

Where OUSA decides that a user’s conduct within our areas is not acceptable, but that it is a relatively minor or unwitting breach of the rules, consideration will be given to the use of an informal warning.

Informal warnings are intended to draw attention to, or clarify, the conduct that is unacceptable. As part of an informal warning the person concerned may be required to issue an explanation, either to an individual or to a forum. Where an informal warning has been issued this and any offensive messages concerned will be kept on file for a specified period of time (see table at 3. below) and may be referred to in the future if there is a need to take further action.

Informal warnings will most commonly be issued by Mentor Moderators (see Section C) but may also be issued by members of staff operating the OUSA Controller id.

c. Formal Action

Where OUSA decides that the offending conduct is more serious, or where previous informal warnings have been ineffective, or where a user has more than two current informal warnings, formal disciplinary action may be taken. This may include penalties ranging from a period of “read only” access to any or all forums through exclusion from one or more forums, temporary exclusion from OUSA forums, permanent exclusion from OUSA’s Forum area, to, in the case of OUSA members, expulsion from the Association.
Whenever OUSA is considering taking formal disciplinary action against a user of our services, the person will be informed of the case against them and will be given the opportunity to put their side of the story. Once OUSA has made a decision, the person will be informed of the basis of the decision and any penalty to be applied. At that time the person will also be reminded of any right of appeal.

Although there are different levels of sanction under this procedure, users cannot assume that they are entitled to any particular number of warnings or levels of penalty. OUSA reserves the right to apply the level of disciplinary penalty which it feels appropriate in all the circumstances. The higher level penalties will only be awarded by senior, elected representatives (i.e. students) and in the case of the more serious penalties, there will be a right of appeal.

d. Summary of Disciplinary Procedure

The table below summarises the key features of action under this Disciplinary Procedure. The word “exclusion” means the removal of all access to OUSA’s public forums.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>AUTHORITY TO ISSUE *</th>
<th>APPEAL RIGHTS</th>
<th>TIME HELD ON FILE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apology required</td>
<td>OUSA Controller</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Warning</td>
<td>OUSA Controller</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Warning with no penalties</td>
<td>OUSA Senior Staff Member</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read only for up to 3 months</td>
<td>OUSA Senior Staff Member</td>
<td>Yes - CAP</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary exclusion of</td>
<td>OUSA Senior Staff Member</td>
<td>Yes - CAP</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTION</td>
<td>AUTHORITY TO ISSUE *</td>
<td>APPEAL RIGHTS</td>
<td>TIME HELD ON FILE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 3 months</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent exclusion</td>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Yes E C Appeal Panel</td>
<td>No expiry time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Suspension of, or expulsion from, OUSA Membership | CAP | Yes C E C Appeal Panel | Suspension 2 years  
Expulsion – no expiry time |

* This refers to the lowest level of authority necessary to issue the penalty.
SECTION C - FORUM MODERATION

1. Introduction
Without Moderators (Mods) OUSA could not provide the suite of social forums currently in existence. OUSA wishes to acknowledge this and give thanks to those volunteers that give their time and energy to providing this service for their peers. Mods carry much of the responsibility for ensuring that our forums comply with the University’s online communication systems guidelines. Whilst some of our forums are less active and less controversial than others, all Mods need certain knowledge and skills to be able to perform the role.
The remainder of Section C provides information about the procedures and processes which aim to acknowledge the importance of our Mods, whilst ensuring they are better resourced and supported in providing this key service on behalf of OUSA.

2. The role of Moderators (Mods)
Moderators are unpaid volunteers who give their time freely. They work within a Moderating Team to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of OUSA social forums in accordance with the rules.

3. The duties of Moderators (Mods)
   a. To work with a team of co-moderators to ensure a forum runs smoothly.
   b. To ensure a forum operates in accordance with the rules. Where a forum is particularly busy, this may mean Mods conferring regularly to ensure that at least one member of the team is available to answer complaints and concerns of contributors within the required period.
   c. To apply the provisions of the Complaints Procedure and Disciplinary Procedure set out in this document.
   d. To ensure that any message which contravenes the rules is deleted and that the sender of the message is notified of this Moderator action at the same time.
e. To ensure all complaints are answered satisfactorily in accordance with OUSA’s guidelines.

f. To provide OUSA Controller with any necessary information for complaints to be dealt with in accordance with the Complaints Procedure.

g. To ensure any information pertaining to informal warnings is passed to the Mentor Moderator team so that it can be kept for reference (see subsection 5).

h. To assist contributors in understanding the rules pertaining to the service in general, and the forum in particular, where agreed by the Mod team.

4. The Requirements for Becoming a Moderator (Mod)

a. A Mod must be a current member of OUSA at the time of their application.

b. A Mod must not have anything more than an informal warning currently on record with the OU or OUSA (i.e. not time expired).

c. A Mod will ideally be an experienced user of the University’s online learning system, or must be prepared to undertake training to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

d. Moderator applications from Associate Lecturers will be accepted. We do however need to point out that while their expertise will be welcomed in course forums that cover their body of expertise, when general student issues are being discussed, their viewpoints will not necessarily be the same as the student viewpoint and conflicting loyalties may be in evidence. On this basis, all applications from ALs will be carefully scrutinized by CAP and their specific merits and any potential problems considered.

e. A Mod must be able to work within a team.

f. A Mod must agree to uphold the rules at all times.
g. A Mod must be able to understand that different forums require a different approach to moderating, and agree to work with the Mod team to find the approach that suits their specific forum the best (as long as it is in accordance with the rules).

h. A Mod must be able to communicate effectively, be aware of the etiquette of electronic communication, and understand the differences between being viewed as a contributor and being viewed as a Moderator of a forum.

i. A Mod must be prepared to review messages in an unbiased manner and treat all contributors with respect.

5. **The Requirement for Forums in Terms of Moderators (Mods)**

a. All forums require a team of Mods in order to function effectively. The ideal is a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6. A forum can operate with fewer Mods than this but it will be taken on a case by case basis and reviewed periodically by OUSA Controller.

b. If OUSA Controller deems that a forum is not adequately covered by Mods, vacancies will be publicised as per section 6a below. If the forum cannot function effectively until new Mods are appointed, the forum will be temporarily made read-only until new appointments are made and a message will be placed in the forum to advise of this action.

6. **The Application Process for Becoming a Moderator (Mod)**

a. Where a new forum is being requested, an advertisement for Mods will be placed in OUSA Forum Requests. Should the Forum be approved, any vacancies not filled by this process will be advertised in OUSA Mods General Discussion. Where an existing forum needs or wants new Mods, an advertisement will be placed in the forum concerned, OUSA Mods General Discussion.

b. Potential applicants who are unsure which forum they wish to moderate must read these guidelines and the rules. If
they are in agreement with the documents, applicants must send a message to OUSA Controller, letting them know that they have read and accepted the details and indicating that they wish to moderate an OUSA forum. Checks will be made in accordance with d (below) and, once the application has been accepted, the applicant will be sent a list of forums in need of additional Mods. The applicant then follows the standard procedure in c (below). If the application is refused, the applicant will be notified and reasons will be given.

c. Potential applicants for a specific forum must read the Spirit of Forum (or proposed Spirit of Forum), these guidelines and the rules. If they are in agreement with these, applicants must send a message to OUSA Controller stating which forum they are applying to moderate and give a brief reason for their application (no more than 300 words please!). They must also complete the OUSA Forums online training pack.

d. The current Mod team of the forum concerned will be notified of an application to join the team in order to give the opportunity for any reasoned objections to be raised. All applications, and any reasoned objections, will be forwarded to the OUSA Controller Advisory Panel (CAP) for consideration. In general, approval will be given when the applicant meets the requirements noted in section 4, but CAP reserves the right to decline any application. All applicants will be notified and reasons will be given to applicants that are unsuccessful. The decision of CAP will be final.

e. Applicants who are successful will be given a six month trial period of moderating. This will be waived if the applicant is already an Accredited Mod or undertaking a trial period. At the end of the trial period, co-moderators and Mentor Moderators (see section 7) will be invited to comment on the performance of the applicant as a Mod. CAP will then review the applicant’s moderating conduct over the trial,
taking into account these comments where necessary, and, if deemed in accordance with these guidelines, will approve the applicant as an Accredited Moderator.

f. If CAP decides at the end of this trial period that the applicant has not fulfilled the requirements for the role of Mod, they will advise the applicant and remove Mod permissions. CAP has the discretion to offer an applicant a further six month trial period, but they are under no obligation to do so, and any decision of CAP at the end of a trial period is final.

g. Moderating an OUSA forum is not a right, it is a responsibility accompanied by specific permissions. If at any time it is proved that a Mod is misusing those permissions or failing in their responsibilities, Moderator permissions will be withdrawn. If there is any doubt over a Mod's conduct, CAP reserves the right to temporarily suspend Mod permissions pending investigation. It should be noted that this will only occur in cases where evidence is provided that is considered of a serious enough nature to warrant suspension of permissions. In the case of all other complaints, Mods will continue to moderate as normal whilst an investigation is undertaken.

h. In considering the possible removal of Moderator status, CAP will follow the principles laid down in Part III of the OUSA Disciplinary Procedure, Complaints Against Representatives; Process for Appointed Posts.

Please Note: Applications will not be considered from individuals who have been subject to formal disciplinary action in relation to their use of the OU’s online learning systems, either by OUSA or the OU.

7. Team of Mentor Moderators (Mods)

a. There will be a team of up to 20 Mentor Moderators. The role of this team will be: to act as mentors for New Mods (see f below); to assist in the moderation of any forum
requiring occasional support; to be the first port of call for advice for Mods (particularly outside office hours when OUSA Controller is unavailable). Members of the OUSA Central Executive Committee cannot serve as Mentor Mods.

b. Current Accredited Mods who have moderated a forum successfully for over 12 months can apply to become part of the Mentor Mods team. They should have the experience of handling various types of forum, settling disputes, and resolving difficult matters.

c. Applicants for the Mentor Mod team should forward a written application to OUSA Controller stating how they feel they would be able to fulfil this role effectively, including examples of challenging situations they have dealt with as a Mod where necessary (no more than 500 words please).

d. Applications will be forwarded to CAP for their consideration. All applicants will be notified of the success or failure of their application, with reasons being given for failure. The decision of CAP is final.

e. Those accepted as Mentor Mods will be given access to a closed forum, OUSA Mentor Mods, which will enable them to effectively carry out their role. This closed forum will also be used for any investigation of complaints against Mentor Mods, and will be accessible to OUSA Controller and CAP. All moderators will have write-only access to OUSA Mentor Mods so that they may contact the team at any point for advice or support.

f. All new Mods will be allocated a Mentor Mod to act as their mentor during their trial period. They can contact the Mentor Mod at any time for support, guidance or advice on any moderating matter.

g. On very rare occasions, Mentor Mods may be called upon by CAP to offer advice. This will only occur where CAP feels that Mentor Mods have knowledge or information that will
assist in their duties, and will be in the strictest confidence and at the discretion of CAP.

h. Where there are more applicants than positions on the Mentor Mods team, CAP will endeavour to select the applicants with the necessary skills, knowledge and personal qualities to support the smooth running of the OUSA suite of forums as a whole.

i. Informal Warnings. Moderators cannot issue informal warnings. This is to ensure impartiality and consistency across the suite of forums and protect both Mods and contributors from abuse of the system. Where a Mod team feel that an informal warning is necessary they must send a message to OUSA Controller requesting that an informal warning be issued, citing any evidence available to support their request and ensuring all members of the Mod team are copied in to the message. The OUSA Controller will review the evidence and decide whether an informal warning is necessary. If an informal warning is deemed necessary, the OUSA Controller will issue the informal warning to the contributor, giving their reason(s) for the decision, and copying the message to the forum Mod team. If an informal warning is not deemed necessary, the OUSA Controller will advise the Mod team of the forum concerned why this decision was reached.

j. Informal warnings will be recorded by OUSA Controller and kept on record for three months.

8. Initial Support and Information for Moderators (Mods)

a. On successful application, all New Mods will be sent a message by OUSA Controller and asked to confirm that they have read and understood the information in the Guidelines and that they agree to operate within the terms stated. They will also be required to return a signed copy of the Moderator’s agreement. This confirmation and Mod’s
agreement will be kept by OUSA for the duration of their time as a Mod.

b. On receipt of this agreement, a mentor will be appointed to a new Mod and any pertinent information will be sent. Mods will also be given access to the OUSA Mods area which contains a practice area and can be used for informal peer support between Mods. Where the Mod is already a Mod of another forum this will not happen, they will just be given the necessary Mod permissions (unless they request a mentor and / or further information).

9. A Code of Conduct for Moderators

a. Mods must be aware of the rules, and their location, and must abide by the rules themselves both when acting as a Mod and as a contributor on all forums.

b. Mods must treat all contributors equally, and be consistent in their approach to the forum and individual contributors.

c. All Mods of a forum are not expected to read every contribution to that forum, but all messages must be read by at least one Mod within the team (e.g. if a Mod goes on holiday they are not expected to read all messages sent in their absence).

d. Mods must respond to a complaint within 48 hours, and ideally within 24 hours, but they do not need to wait for someone to complain before they unapprove a message which clearly breaches the rules. Such messages must be unapproved immediately. Unless complaints are regarding a co-Mod, all complaints should be copied to all members of the Mod team so a consensus decision can be reached. Forwarding a message is acceptable to ensure all Mods are aware of a complaint.

e. Mods should adopt a professional stance at all times when acting in the capacity as Moderator of a forum (e.g. being polite and non-judgemental), and should be aware that their
actions as a contributor to a forum that they moderate can influence the tone of the forum and the behaviour of others.

f. Mods should recognise that the forum belongs to OUSA and the contributors. Mods should only intervene in response to a complaint or a breach of the requirements. They have no more say than any other user of the forum and have no authority to, for example, decide which topics can be discussed (except where stipulated explicitly in the Spirit of Forum) or prescribe the way the forum is viewed.

g. Mods must not provide official support or advice on any matter, other than guidance about the requirements for using the forum. This is particularly important where forums are deemed to be “supportive” in nature, for example health related forums.

h. When unapproving messages, Mods must inform the sender that the message has been unapproved as soon as is reasonably practical. Mods should only unapprove messages which are not in accordance with the Spirit of Forum or the rules. Mods should not delete messages, except at the request of the sender.

i. Mods need to ensure they are not over-zealous or heavy-handed, and should use their judgment on whether aspects such as off-topic conversation should be allowed. It will not be the same for all forums, but it should be recognised that off-topic conversation can allow a forum to run more smoothly at times and a sometimes heavy-handed approach can cause more disruption than a handful of off-topic messages.

j. Mods should be aware that at times it may be necessary to withdraw temporarily from contributing to a forum that they moderate, for example to ensure impartiality when a strong debate is underway.

k. Mods should remember that OUSA forums are open to all. No individual or group of regular contributors should be
given preferential treatment or be allowed to dominate a forum making it an unwelcome place for newcomers or others who may not be quite so vocal.

10. **Support from OUSA Controller**

   a. OUSA Controller is a virtual identity, managed by OUSA staff under the overall control of OUSA President. The OUSA Controller identity operates during office hours from Monday to Friday and can be contacted via a generic mailbox at ousa-controller@open.ac.uk

   b. Formal complaints about any matters to do with OUSA’s online public forums should be addressed to the OUSA Controller in the first instance and clearly titled OUSA Complaints.

   c. General enquiries can be sent to the OUSA Controller mailbox and will be answered as soon as possible, but it is advisable to first seek an answer or advice from Mentor Mods or OUSA Mods Discussion, whichever is most appropriate. If an issue requires an urgent response, the mail should be marked “urgent” so that it may be given priority. Please only use the “urgent” identifier when it is necessary to ensure the most urgent matters are addressed efficiently.

   d. OUSA Controller will make every effort to answer enquiries or deal with problems as soon as possible. It would be helpful if subject lines could clearly indicate the nature of the problem or enquiry (e.g. Advice required on X, Moderator application, Moderator resignation, Ruling required on Y and so on) to assist the efficient operation of the mailbox.
SECTION D. FORUM REQUESTS

1. Introduction

Within reason, OUSA is happy to make provision for whatever forum topics members would like to discuss with other students as long as these are consistent with the Spirit of the OUSA Forum and the rules placed on all users of the service. However, there are a number of practical factors which need to be considered when we receive requests for new forums.

We do not want to have huge numbers of forums used by very small numbers of people. This can be an undue burden on both OUSA and the University’s administrative and technical support and can also cause unnecessary clutter making the service generally more difficult to manage and navigate. We will also seek to avoid overlapping forums or those scarcely differentiated from existing forums for the same reason. Another type of forum which we will seek to avoid are those which go beyond self help and which might imply that they are a source of expert advice which could give rise to liability arising either for OUSA or the University or both. We will undertake regular housekeeping on the system and seek to remove forums that are not being used.

2. Requesting a Forum

There is a dedicated forum for making forum requests and it is called OUSA Forum Request. This forum is solely for registering requests for a new forum; for those who wish to indicate their support for, or opposition to, establishing such a forum; and for any users who want to point out that the topic is covered elsewhere.

If you want to request a new forum you will need to include a draft Spirit of Forum and the details of any persons volunteering to act as
Mods. If you have not drafted a Spirit of Forum before, it is sensible to look at a sample of these for other forums. If the proposed Mods are not existing Mods, then they will need to make an application in the usual way (see section 6 above).

3. Processing Your Request

Decisions on requests that appear fairly uncontroversial and simple to implement have been devolved to a senior member of OUSA staff. The things we consider are; what support there has been in Forum Request; the adequacy of the Spirit of Forum; sufficient volunteers to Moderate the forum..

If the request appears as if it may be contentious e.g. there is a problem with the Spirit of Forum; the discussion about the forum request has provoked antagonistic debate which might prove difficult to contain later on; there is a potential conflict with the identity of OUSA or the University, then it will be referred to CAP.

The decision of whether or not to approve a particular forum request and which students will be appointed to moderate the Forum will be entirely at the discretion of the CAP.

Once a decision has been reached by OUSA a message will be posted on Forum Request either confirming a timetable for the creation of the forum or a reason for the forum not being created. All new forums start up on a six month probationary period during which the conduct on the forum and usage will be kept under review.
THE OUSA DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE - 2007/60

Part I – Complaints against members

Anybody can make a complaint to the President that a member’s conduct is injurious to the character of OUSA and if the President accepts that there is a case to answer, the matter shall be dealt with under this Disciplinary Procedure. If the President feels it necessary the member complained of shall, without prejudice to the outcome, be suspended from membership until the proceedings, including any appeal, have been concluded.

The conduct of students involved in University events and activities will normally be a matter for the University to deal with under its rules and procedures. However, should the conduct of a student who acts in any representative capacity on behalf of OUSA be called into question, even though the student is not at the time carrying out his/her OUSA role, OUSA reserves the right to consider action under this Disciplinary Procedure.

The President will appoint a panel of not less than 2 Executive Committee members who will conduct such investigation as they feel appropriate ensuring that the subject of the complaint has a full opportunity to put their case. The panel will be empowered to make a decision. The panel shall decide whether the offence of which the member is accused is, in their opinion, injurious to the character of OUSA or its members. If in the opinion of the panel the offence is proven then they may award the following penalties:

- suspension from post or representative role or from all posts/representative roles for a specified period
- suspension from membership for a specified period
- expulsion from membership

Expulsion shall remain in force where a student ceases to study but subsequently returns to study and otherwise would have become
entitled to membership. A full report shall be given by the panel to the member concerned of the reasons for its decision(s).

Members who have been the subject of the disciplinary process described above shall have the absolute right to appeal to the Appeals Panel of the Central Executive Committee. This panel shall be chaired by the President, Student Member of Council, Deputy President or a Vice President. The panel shall consist of 4 further members of the Central Executive Committee (5 in total) who shall have had no role in the original panel. Appeals will only be heard on two grounds – that the evidence provided to the first panel was insufficient to allow them to reach the decision that they did or that the penalty awarded was not commensurate with the offence. This panel shall receive the report of the first panel and shall invite rebuttal by the suspended member. Due regard should be given to significant medical conditions.

If a member is either temporarily suspended or expelled from OUSA the University will be notified of that fact and if the member holds a representative position within the University OUSA will make a formal request to be allowed to appoint a replacement to that post. OUSA reserves the right to notify the University of the reasons for such suspension or expulsion where it believes that the student may be a threat to other students or the University.

**Part II – Administration of OUSA’s Affairs**

If at any time it is brought to the General Manager’s attention that Association Officers are being negligent in their responsibilities and/or the business affairs of OUSA are not being properly attended to, then the General Manager has the right to suspend those elected officials concerned and appoint new officials in their place and/or take control of running the business affairs of OUSA concerned, for such period as the General Manager deems necessary pending an inquiry into the matter.
If the General Manager is required to act in such a manner, the General Manager will inform the Central Executive Committee who will appoint two of their number to perform an inquiry into this matter. These people will report to the Central Executive Committee on the results of their inquiry and the Central Executive Committee will act on their findings.

**Part III – Complaints against Representatives**

Procedures for removing the following:

- specified Central Executive Committee Members,
- Officers of Regional Forum Assemblies,
- Officers of Disabled Students Group,
- Officers of Societies Standing Committee or
- Other Postholders
- Other Representatives, whether elected or appointed.

Process for elected posts

1. A complaint is made by any full voting member of the constituency in writing to the Secretary, Chair, Returning Officer or equivalent of the unit or electoral panel concerned. This complaint shall be supported by no fewer than two further full voting members of that same constituency.

2. The appropriate responsible person(s) will then make arrangements to ensure that a motion of no confidence is put to the constituency* in full consideration of the following principles:

3. The person(s) complained of must:
   
   a. Be provided with the full details of the criticism or complaint
   b. Be afforded full opportunity to respond to the allegations;
c. Have a right to reasonable notice to present a defence or rebuttal;

4. The process and the decisions taken must be recorded accurately and a report provided to all parties, with a copy to the OUSA General Manager.

5. This process may be face to face, virtual or by post, as is appropriate and in consideration of any accessibility problems that may exist.

6. Full details of the complaint shall be provided, in writing, to the members considering this matter, especially including the member complained of. The member complained of shall have the opportunity to put his or her case before taking a vote on the substantive motion.

7. The outcome of the vote shall be recorded and the General Manager informed; there is no appeal against a vote of no confidence.

*With the exception of the Disabled Students Group, where the motion of no confidence will be put to the committee in private meeting.

Process for appointed posts

An appointing body may de-select a post-holder at any time, following review of performance or having received complaint. The body must give notice of its intention and reasons and provide the member concerned with the opportunity to put his or her case to the appointing body before any decision is made. In the case of any representative to the University who is de-selected, the University shall be notified that OUSA has had occasion to review that person’s position and formally request that OUSA be allowed to appoint a replacement to that post.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit / Electoral Panel / Appointing Body</th>
<th>Office / Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional Forum/Assembly</td>
<td>Any Officer, postholder, representative or delegate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled Students Group Committee</td>
<td>Any Officer, postholder, representative or delegate</td>
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<tr>
<td>(On behalf of the Group)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Societies Standing Committee</td>
<td>Chair or Societies Representative to the Central Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Student Panel to Regional Committee / Regional Consultative Committee</td>
<td>Representative to Central Consultative Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Forum/Assembly Sub-Committee</td>
<td>Any appointed representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Electoral Panel</td>
<td>Central Executive Committee Member for the Region / Sub-Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Student Academic Link panel</td>
<td>Student Academic Links</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Academic Links</td>
<td>Central Executive Committee Member for Student Academic Links</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Executive Committee Appointments Sub Committee</td>
<td>Any appointed central representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Central Executive Committee Panels</td>
<td>Any other type of representative appointed to the Central Executive Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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THE OUSA HARASSMENT POLICY AND ASSOCIATED PROCEDURE (2002/134) (R2007)

PROCEDURES

Policy Statement

1. OUSA is committed to the pursuit of equal opportunities and to enabling, promoting and supporting the right of all students to participate in the Association. Central to such a commitment is the right of all those taking part in OUSA activities (whether or not they are OUSA members):
   i) to be treated with respect
   ii) not to be subjected to any form of demeaning, intimidating or discriminatory behavior;
   iii) not to be made to feel afraid or threatened by the conduct of others.

2. This Policy is intended to cover all forms of harassment, whatever the basis. (Examples of some, but not all, of the forms that harassment may take are given in Appendix 6.1)

3. This Policy equably applies to social events and social time related to OUSA activities, and not just to formal meetings.

4. The primary objective of this Policy is to ensure that all members are clear about the standard of conduct required of them so that others do not have cause to raise complaints about them. All members taking part in OUSA activities should, therefore, have proper regard to their conduct, in terms of both the things that they say and the actions that they take, and should ensure that they do not infringe the right of others to participate in the Association.

5. To ensure its effectiveness, this Policy is supported by a set of procedures which provide, for those who do not feel that they have been treated in accordance with the Policy, the means for...
OUSA to try to end any harassment.

Procedure

Wherever possible, the person who believes that they have been harassed must retain control over how formally any complaint is dealt with.

Any complaint should be dealt with at the lowest of the following levels (from Level 1 up to Level 4) which is both appropriate for the circumstances and acceptable to the person making the complaint. Where a resolution is not achieved at a particular level it should be referred to a level higher up. This Procedure does not, however, require a complaint to commence at Level 1 or for it to be progressed through each level in turn.

Level 1.

The person making the complaint expresses their concerns directly to the person responsible for the perceived harassment. If they require some support to do this, they could ask for assistance from someone in whom they have confidence. Such an approach may resolve the problem if the person complained about does not realise how their actions have been interpreted.

Level 2.

A formal complaint is made to the person responsible (on behalf of OUSA) for the activity from which the complaint arose. That person should then, after taking advice from the General Manager, investigate the complaint and, if necessary, try to find some way by which it could be resolved.

Level 3.
A formal complaint is made to either the Student Support Link for the Region in which the activity from which the complaint arose was organised, or the Vice President Student Support, where the activity was not organised by or within a single Region. The Student Support Link or Vice President Student Support will then investigate the complaint and, if necessary, try to find some way by which it could be resolved.

**Level 4.**

A formal complaint is made to the General Manager who will investigate the complaint and, if necessary, try to find some way by which it could be resolved.

All formal complaints, and their outcomes, must be reported to the President so that the complaint and outcome can be recorded.

Where it is felt appropriate, the matter may also be dealt with under OUSA’s Disciplinary Procedure (Appendix 5 of the Register of Decisions).

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**Appendix 6.1**

**EXAMPLES OF HARASSMENT**

As examples, harassment can take the following forms:

- unwanted sexual attention; bullying;
- misuse of authority;
- non acceptance of a person’s gender, sexuality, race or disability;
- misuse of a person’s social or economic disadvantage.

This list, however, is not exhaustive.