Welcome to your Students Association magazine, a place to share your stories, connect with other students, and find out what we’ve been up to.

2 Meet your newly elected OU Students Association Officers

4 Get students survey - we really need your views!

7 University Challenge 2014! Meet the teams and have your own pop-up Paxman party

11 OU student has a close shave for charity

13 The oddest places OU students have studied

16 Find out about new OU student volunteering opportunities

OU Students Association

+44 (0)1908 652026
ousa@open.ac.uk
www.open.ac.uk/ousa

Charity Commission Registration in England and Wales: 1144251; and in Scotland: SC042840
Say hello to your newly elected Association Officer Team...

Elected during Conference 2014 your Association Officers will be in post for the next 2 years. Meet them all along with your Student Association Representatives (SARs), Board of Trustees and Student OU Council Member here.

Hello and welcome to your latest edition of OUstudents.

Firstly I would like to personally thank Marianne Cantieri for the past 3 years as President and secondly, I would like to tell you a bit about myself.

I live in Scotland, in Dumfries and Galloway and I’ve been a student with the OU since 2003. I gained my BSc (Hons) in Health and Social Care in 2009 and am currently working towards an MA in Social Sciences.

All change
Conference elected a new Officer team in June and we all took on our roles from the beginning of August.

Our new Deputy President is Nik Morris. Previously she was Vice President Representation so she brings plenty of experience to her new role. David Humble and Alison Kingan were re-elected to their roles as VP Administration and VP Student Support respectively. We also have four new officers with varying degrees of OUSA experience. Josh Brumpton is our new VP Education Policy, Peter Cowan will be VP Education Support and Research, Sue Goodyear will be VP Representation and last but certainly not least our new VP Communications is Lorraine Adams. Carey Shaw also continues as our Student OU Council Member.

As a team we will continue to work towards better student engagement and improved consultation between the University and it’s students. These are both items which have seen improvement recently but could always continue to be improved.

One of the first series of meetings I attended as part of my new role was about the National Student Survey and I am very pleased to report that OUSA has improved by 3% for the second year running. This shows that we are reaching more students whether through our research, Facebook, Twitter and through our forums. However, we cannot afford to be complacent and we must continue to reach as many students as we can. The OU continues to maintain its place in the top 10 universities in the UK.

We’d also like to take this opportunity to say a massive thank you to the out-going Officers and SARs for all their hard work and dedication over the years.

A special mention and thank you to Marianne Cantieri (out-going President), Hazel Pegg (out-going VP Communications), Sandra Summers (out-going VP Education Policy), Jon Rainford (out-going VP Educational Support and Research), Mal Morris (out-going Student Trustee) and Joan Jones (out-going Student Trustee).

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: "Struggling to study in this heat"
So, it’s all over for another 2 years but Conference 2014 was one not to be forgotten, we all had a blast and it looks like you did too.

Conference 2014 was all about getting inspired, engaged and involved, and you really did! The range of workshops and talks by key public figures got you inspired, fun social activities and interactive sessions got you engaged and your Student Elections got you involved in all things OU students. During Conference you also voted for some big changes, not only did you elect the students you wanted to represent you over the next 2 years but you also voted for changes to our set-up including the way you vote. David Humble, VP Administration talks us through some of these changes here.

Thank you to everyone involved for a really stimulating, challenging and well organised 2014 Conference!

Bill Nash, OU student

Pictured: OU students getting involved across the OU campus, Milton Keynes.

Have you seen all the photos and watched the video yet?

Watch the video  Look at the photos

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “Don’t panic. Just keep up with the study planner”
Get Students Survey: We need you!

As an Open University student, you are part of a huge community of students all embarking on learning journeys – discovering new interests and skills, and balancing studies with the other demands of their lives. This is all in the context of a huge amount of change happening in Higher Education at the moment, some which has already started affecting OU students, and no doubt more on the horizon with the 2015 General Election.

It is really important that we, your Students Association adapts to this changing landscape, keeping our focus on the issues that matter to you and providing the kinds of opportunities and support mechanisms that you want.

We want to understand how you feel about being an Open University Student, and how you would like to be part of that community – whether that is helping to promote the interests and views of the student body, linking up with other students, or getting access to help and services to support your learning.

We have launched a survey open to all students to invite your feedback about your OU Students Association, so that we can use this to ensure we make a positive contribution to your study experience with the OU. The online survey should take about 15 minutes, and is open until 13th October 2014. If you have any questions about the survey and how your responses will be used, please contact our Research & Information Officer at: OUSA@open.ac.uk

Thank you for your time, and I hope you will take the opportunity to get involved and help shape the future of your OU Students Association.

By Ruth Tudor, President

The Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

Many OU students need some help and support during their studies. That might include someone to mind the children while you attend that vital tutorial or needing help in reducing your ironing pile before it reaches the ceiling.

Unfortunately, the OU is very lapse in providing ironing specialists but the support for students with disabilities, those with specific learning difficulties or long term medical conditions, can be diverse and extensive.

Some support is provided by the OU to all students, but a Disabled Students Allowance or DSA can augment this for students in the UK. More details, including eligibility criteria, are available here.

The DSA is not means tested, nor is it a loan and will not affect benefits which are already being received. It is available for all eligible students and is targeted to the needs of the individual student. Currently support ranges from travel costs to equipment and software, but can also include funding for non-medical helpers and mental health mentors.

This government has proposed changes, initially affecting students applying for a DSA in England from September 2015. The OU recently released a statement about this, which is on your Student Home Page, here. I hope one sentence will ease some fears because not all support depends on the DSA. “These changes do not affect the standard services the University provides because these are not funded through a student’s personal DSA.” It also says that students’ interests will be represented by the OU during the government’s consultation about the proposed changes. OUSA will also be ensuring our students’ experiences are heard.

However, support is not confined to students with disabilities, your Student Support Team will discuss ways the OU might be able to assist you with your studies – apart from reducing your ironing pile. Please consider contacting your SST if you are experiencing difficulties.

By Alison Kingan, Vice President Student Support

● Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “I have serious materials despatch envy”
The Open degree: Freedom and choice

I’ve always wanted to be a teacher, and originally went to university to study physics. After the first year I decided to transfer my credits from full time university to the OU and to study for the Open degree, as I realised that I should have studied chemistry instead.

The Open degree allowed me to choose modules that interested me, which included chemistry, biology, molecular biology, geology, maths and maths education. With the Open degree I didn’t have to worry about doing project modules or going to residential schools.

Without the Open degree I wouldn’t have been able to study a range of subjects which has given me a broad based knowledge ready for when I start my PGCE Primary in September 2014.

Without the Open degree I don’t think I would have been able to follow my teaching dream. What made things even better was that my mum had also been studying for her second Open degree, gaining her first Open degree in 1978, picking up modules when she wished, and although we didn’t study the same subjects at the same time, we did finish our degrees with the same module, and so graduated together.

Here is a picture (above) of me and my mum, Pat, graduating together in Birmingham, June 2014.

By Gayna Bailey, OU student

The BA/BSc (Hons) Open degree (BD/QD) is the OU’s largest degree and the most flexible degree programme in the UK, giving students huge freedom of choice across the OU’s full range of subject areas.

What do you think?
As part of the 2014 OUSA Conference, the OU hosted a stand asking students “What does the Open degree mean to you…?” and were very grateful to all those students who took up position in their comfy armchair to record their thoughts!

However, it is not too late to get involved… The OU also set up an online noticeboard where you can contribute your thoughts on the Open degree and they’d love to hear from you if you have a story to share.

You can access the noticeboard at http://padlet.com/wall/jfti1n4eqsuh - you should also be able to upload photos and video so feel free to be as creative as you like!

My studies have had a tremendous impact on my career

Studying at the Open University has been an incredible and positive journey, extremely hard work, juggling assignments, work and family.

Studying at this level has challenged my thinking, writing and helped me gain different perspectives from others. I have become more methodical and able to meet deadlines, the OU has taught me not to give up, to be persistent, if the going gets tough, just keep heading in the direction you want to go. My greatest challenge was to discipline myself weekly to get the essays completed. I spent both weekday evenings and weekends studying.

My studies have had a tremendous impact on my career too. I run my own business providing vocational training to students in fitness and health instruction up to level 4, teaching and working on overseas assignments with students internships from other institutes.

So far I have won the European Language Label Award as a Highly Commended Community Project and an Erasmus Entrepreneurs Award.

By Sarah Grocutt, OU student
My past, your future

Clifford Dadson is 95 years old, the oldest OU student. Here, he shares his journey with us and his plans for his next adventure... a skydive for charity!

I left school in 1936 and went into the telecommunications industry. With the end of WW2 I was involved in a new technology – remote control of the TV link to Scotland, and of the control of remote high-voltage (33kv upwards) substations for the electricity supply industry over landline or radio links.

In 1953, I was offered a post with the electricity supply industry in Yorkshire. I was now at the beginning of a career which held tremendous possibilities.

In the meantime, I had been attending evening classes to obtain Higher National Certificate in Engineering with endorsements in physics and advanced mathematics. I never looked back with these qualifications behind me and there followed a wonderful career in which I carried responsibilities for new communication technology in the electricity supply industry, some of which even overspill into the gas and coal industries! It took me all over Europe and even to Japan.

I am not unique – I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, but it would not have been possible without the study and qualifications I worked for.

Since I retired in 1984, I felt the urge to continue study although in a different field of interest. My early-days qualifications would not count for anything towards a degree today, so the OU told me, so I took advantage of the University’s wide range of subjects and studied for an Arts Degree with modules far removed from my previous activity.

As to YOUR future, may I suggest that you set a career objective, plan a way to reach it via a course of modules, sign up with OU and GO FOR IT!

To which I would add a strong warning – do not be put off by apparent difficulties or disappointments; stick at it and never give up. I have found all my Tutors ready to hasten to my help and to give me that much-needed encouragement to “Press On”.

My next challenge will be attempting a skydive in September for charity!

Every good wish to you all.

The Careers & Employability Project – Have your say!

Employability has been a hot topic across higher education for a while now and, with students at the OU increasingly studying for career reasons (though we certainly appreciate that isn’t all of you!), we are keen to ensure that our offering meets the needs of our diverse body of students.

In order to do this though, we need to hear what you have to say on the matter.

It’s an exciting time for the OU’s Careers Advisory Service; we’ve been beavering away on our Careers and Employability project since 2011. One part of the project’s current focus involves examining how best to deliver a market-leading service to students.

As part of this we’re reviewing the existing Service and are planning a way forward which ensures an even more tailored and inclusive approach.

This will be supported by tools that we can use to track our performance, and the implementation of three exciting pilot schemes, trialling new services for students:

1. Working with employers to raise the profile of the OU and ultimately advertise more vacancies via our online vacancy service, JobZone
2. Expanding our social media presence on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
3. Career Mentoring

All of these activities will help towards ensuring that you, our student body, will be supported to achieve your career goals, secure good jobs, and make the most of your studies and the skills you’re developing.

We’ve already been consulting with students via the OUSA Conference, the Student Consultative Forum, and through focus groups; however if you have any comments or suggestions then we would love to hear from you!

For more information on the project or to share your thoughts, please get in touch at student-careers-feedback@open.ac.uk using “The Careers & Employability Project” as the subject.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “It all started with a mum who read to me”
University Challenge:
Lets meet the team...

We know you are just as excited as us about seeing our very own OU students team face Paxman on University Challenge.

So, we thought you would like to know a little more about the fab team of OU Students who will be representing you!

Team Captain:
Lynne Jones
Hometown:
Bolton

What made you apply for University Challenge?
I applied because I’m a great fan of the series (I watched it back in the 1960s, when Bamber Gascoigne was asking the questions). I’ve always wanted to do it, but this was my first chance.

Team Member:
Stuart Taylor
Hometown: Brighton (Hove, actually)

What was the hardest bit of the application process?
Competing with a buzzer for the first time at the OU Students Association auditions. You quickly realise that unless you buzz early you will never face a question, but getting in early means buzzing before you are 100% sure of an answer. Finding the sweet spot took some trial-and-error (I still bear the scars of early interruptions at the auditions).

Team Member:
Kate Law
Hometown: Melness, 50 miles from Thurso.

How did you feel about facing the infamous Jeremy Paxman?
I didn't feel too apprehensive about facing Jeremy, thinking more of the questions than the man, I suppose. Paxman's scorn at a dumb answer is far less terrifying than scorn from friends and family over any glaring ignorances.

Team Member:
Daniele Gibney
Hometown: I’m originally from Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I now live in Cambridge. I have a penchant for places with no hills and lots of bikes.

What advice would you give to another OU student thinking about trying out for the show?
Just have a go. I never thought I would make the team, and am still gobsmacked that we got through to the televised rounds. Don’t think ‘Oh, I’ll never get picked’ - you never know...

Do you think you’ve got what it takes to be in the 2015 OU University Challenge team?

Click here to register your interest and complete the application form

Team Member:
Gary Male
Hometown: Sleaford, Lincolnshire.

What’s your favourite subject?
I have always liked maths and the questions related to that, I guess because I like puzzles. Anything where there is some lateral thinking involved I am very interested in. That said, I do seem to have gained a lot of my knowledge from The Simpsons and professional wrestling!

#WinWin: We’re talking to OVER 20,000 OU students on social media #AMAZING!
University Challenge: A great excuse for a party!!!

At last we can let you know that the OU student team is appearing on the BBC’s University Challenge on 15th September*

They’ve been sworn to secrecy about the outcome and we’re all excited to find out how well they performed. But let’s be honest – they are already winners having competed with 130 other teams to get one of the coveted 28 places.

That’s why we’re encouraging OU students with their families and friends to hold a pop up University Challenge party to celebrate our evening in the spotlight. So, we’ve put together a suggested recipe for success...

Here’s your Starter for Ten
Take one large bag of tortilla chips, a generous handful of grated cheddar, some mozzarella, chopped chilli or jalapenos (optional). Scatter chips on a plate, sprinkle with cheeses and chillies before microwaving for 30 seconds. For extra points, serve with tomato salsa and guacamole.

Fingers on the Buzzers
Print, prepare and wear your Paxman guise (next page). Kick back and enjoy as OU students go into battle. Take a stab at random questions jotting down your points on the previously prepared score sheet below. (Remember it’s a 5 point penalty for any interruption.)

At the Gong
Win or lose there’s lots to jump up and down about. It’s been 15 years since OU students have appeared in the show and we are convinced our very smart team (see page 7) will do us proud.

*Transmission date is correct at time of going to press.

Play along score sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starter for 10…</th>
<th>Bonus 1…</th>
<th>Bonus 2…</th>
<th>Bonus 3…</th>
<th>Sub-total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “TMA05 - an orgy of blood, witchcraft, and tea breaks”
Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “I secretly love my course #studentconfession”
Wife, mum, studentbum...

I am a working mother and a wife with three young children, aged 10, 2 and 1. Five years ago, I decided that I would like to ‘do something with my life.’ I still don’t know what that really means.

I work part time in administration. I didn’t go to university at the usual age – too busy with my youth to settle or to decide what it was I wanted to do. But five years ago I decided that I wanted to embark upon a journey. I knew that it would be a long road. I knew that I would have to work hard. I didn’t quite know how quickly the time would fly.

I graduate next year, hopefully with flying colours and a BA (Hons) in History. Five years have flown since I made the decision to ‘do something with my life.’

During this time, I have worked hard at my studies. Real-life also continued alongside. I got engaged and then married. Quickly followed by two beautiful new-born babies - quite a handful, but more than worth the extra hard work. Constantly wading through nappies and split milk to get to my module materials, reading on a packed train in rush hour on the way to work. Writing my own blog to help other students and make people laugh. Nominated for an award for blogging, trains to London and PR events.

Sometimes the only sense in the chaos were my OU books – the constant of having tasks to do, essays to write, material to read. My own calm. Busy but happy.

I have almost finished with my degree at the OU. Flexible learning was the best way for me. My circumstances (or finances) would not have allowed me to study at a brick university.

I was always desperate to do something with my life, to learn, to feed my brain to be a role model to my children. To achieve my goal. Five years has passed and I realise that, thanks to the Open University, I have done something with my life; I am doing great things with my life, and the future looks bright.

By Kerrie McGiveron,
OU student

http://www.wifemumstudentbum.com
Twitter: @mardykerrie

Studying is a dream come true!

As I left my youngest son at University I drove home wishing I could be there. I decided to research and see if there was a way I could get a degree and improve my life as I hated doing endless jobs to make ends meet as a single parent.

I discovered the Open University and decided to see if they would accept me with the few qualifications that I had. In my younger days it was emphasised that getting a job was more important than qualifications and I wasn’t allowed to stay on at school and complete A levels so I thought I had no chance of being accepted.

I was so happy when I was accepted for my first module, yet scared when the text books arrived and the thought of my first assignment was quite daunting.

It was exciting and amazing to listen to tutorials online and speak with a tutor if I wanted to. There was no pressure and a support team were always available along with the tutor at any time of day to email or speak by telephone.

“I linked up with other students on the forums so I made friends too."

I found waiting for the results of an assignment so rewarding especially if I received a good mark and gradually I became hooked on courses. The years have passed so quickly and now I have just finished my final module for my BSc Honours in Sport, Fitness and Management.

I just can’t believe I have done this and gained so much knowledge. I’ve also become a level 2 fitness instructor as part of my course and also I’m a coach in various sports. I’m now working in a school as a fitness instructor and also teaching PE. I plan lessons and love every minute of my job.

This is like a dream come true and I often pinch myself when I’m outside with students teaching rounders etc. This was my dream at 21 and now I have achieved it at my age... just amazing and all thanks to the Open University. Anyone can reach their goals and dreams, however high they are!

By Amanda Halifax,
OU student

• Best overheard #OUStudent comment: "Dispose of any life you may have; you’ve got a new life"
OU student has a close shave for charity

Nicola Simpson is a BSc Health and Social Care student, living in Belfast, and is the new Students Association Representative (SAR) for Northern Ireland. On June 1st, she sat in a room full of friends, family and strangers to have her head shaved for the first time...

"The results are in!"

Meet Liz. As a teenager, Liz found herself a bit lost in the education system. Not being able to get the idea of returning to study out of her mind, Liz enrolled on The OU’s Science, Technology and Maths Access module.

We’ve been following Liz’s journey as she discovers the highs and lows of returning to study and what it means to be an OU student. Find out how she’s getting on...

Finally the results for that all-important EMA were in. I blinked several times to make sure I was reading the result correctly; yes, it did say I achieved a distinction!

I felt nauseous. I was given a swig of beer. I tapped my feet and twiddled my thumbs as my hair came showering down around me like a snow storm and my mother looked on with a look that said ‘really Nicola, is that not short enough?’ Some friends looked on with tears in their eyes; I knew they were thinking of their own and their loved ones experiences of cancer. I was thinking about the kindness of strangers and how unexpectedly long it took to shave a head!

Like most of us in the UK I have been no stranger to raising money for charity. Having my head shaved was, by far the most emotional of my fundraising efforts, not least because the charity we chose to support does such fantastic work.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children (NICFC) offers practical, emotional and financial support to children, teenagers, young adults with cancer and their families. NICFC recently opened a new therapeutic centre, Daisy Lodge, which provides short breaks to families nursing a child with cancer, bereaved families and families in which a parent has been diagnosed with cancer. You can find out more about the work of NICFC by visiting their website at: http://www.nicfc.com

The support from friends, family and the general public including fellow OU students has been astounding. Thank you. Initially I thought we might raise £500 but our current fundraising total stands at a little less than £2000. We had support from friends who supplied cakes on the day, A Thousand Words Photography who provided us with a fun photo booth and Mark Blair who delighted with his musical talent.

If you wish to support our fundraising efforts it is still possible to donate online at: http://bit.ly/1s4amLf or by texting ‘HEAD97 £5’ to 70070

The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!

I know my next module will be tougher. It will test my time management skills but I believe I can do it by putting into practice the skills I’ve learned so far.

I can’t wait to get started on my OU next module!

"The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!"

Share your story!

It can be isolating being an OU student, but your amazing and uplifting student stories are a great way to share your experiences and to realise you’re not on your own!

So, please share your story with us at: ousa@open.ac.uk

Liz Hull, OU student

“The results are in!”

Meet Liz. As a teenager, Liz found herself a bit lost in the education system. Not being able to get the idea of returning to study out of her mind, Liz enrolled on The OU’s Science, Technology and Maths Access module.

We’ve been following Liz’s journey as she discovers the highs and lows of returning to study and what it means to be an OU student. Find out how she’s getting on...

Finally the results for that all-important EMA were in. I blinked several times to make sure I was reading the result correctly; yes, it did say I achieved a distinction!

After grinning to myself for a fairly substantial time period I informed my work colleague, closely followed by my family and friends. Very quickly celebration plans were put into place. I worked hard, now time to play hard!

The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!

I know my next module will be tougher. It will test my time management skills but I believe I can do it by putting into practice the skills I’ve learned so far.

I can’t wait to get started on my OU next module!

"The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!"

I felt nauseous. I was given a swig of beer. I tapped my feet and twiddled my thumbs as my hair came showering down around me like a snow storm and my mother looked on with a look that said ‘really Nicola, is that not short enough?’ Some friends looked on with tears in their eyes; I knew they were thinking of their own and their loved ones experiences of cancer. I was thinking about the kindness of strangers and how unexpectedly long it took to shave a head!

I was thinking about the kindness of strangers and how unexpectedly long it took to shave a head!

Like most of us in the UK I have been no stranger to raising money for charity. Having my head shaved was, by far the most emotional of my fundraising efforts, not least because the charity we chose to support does such fantastic work.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children (NICFC) offers practical, emotional and financial support to children, teenagers, young adults with cancer and their families. NICFC recently opened a new therapeutic centre, Daisy Lodge, which provides short breaks to families nursing a child with cancer, bereaved families and families in which a parent has been diagnosed with cancer. You can find out more about the work of NICFC by visiting their website at: http://www.nicfc.com

The support from friends, family and the general public including fellow OU students has been astounding. Thank you. Initially I thought we might raise £500 but our current fundraising total stands at a little less than £2000. We had support from friends who supplied cakes on the day, A Thousand Words Photography who provided us with a fun photo booth and Mark Blair who delighted with his musical talent.

If you wish to support our fundraising efforts it is still possible to donate online at: http://bit.ly/1s4amLf or by texting ‘HEAD97 £5’ to 70070

"The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!"

The most important thing this Access course has given me is confidence and lots of it!

I can’t wait to get started on my OU next module!

OU student has a close shave for charity

Nicola Simpson is a BSc Health and Social Care student, living in Belfast, and is the new Students Association Representative (SAR) for Northern Ireland. On June 1st, she sat in a room full of friends, family and strangers to have her head shaved for the first time...

I felt nauseous. I was given a swig of beer. I tapped my feet and twiddled my thumbs as my hair came showering down around me like a snow storm and my mother looked on with a look that said ‘really Nicola, is that not short enough?’ Some friends looked on with tears in their eyes; I knew they were thinking of their own and their loved ones experiences of cancer. I was thinking about the kindness of strangers and how unexpectedly long it took to shave a head!

Like most of us in the UK I have been no stranger to raising money for charity. Having my head shaved was, by far the most emotional of my fundraising efforts, not least because the charity we chose to support does such fantastic work.

The Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children (NICFC) offers practical, emotional and financial support to children, teenagers, young adults with cancer and their families. NICFC recently opened a new therapeutic centre, Daisy Lodge, which provides short breaks to families nursing a child with cancer, bereaved families and families in which a parent has been diagnosed with cancer. You can find out more about the work of NICFC by visiting their website at: http://www.nicfc.com

The support from friends, family and the general public including fellow OU students has been astounding. Thank you. Initially I thought we might raise £500 but our current fundraising total stands at a little less than £2000. We had support from friends who supplied cakes on the day, A Thousand Words Photography who provided us with a fun photo booth and Mark Blair who delighted with his musical talent.

If you wish to support our fundraising efforts it is still possible to donate online at: http://bit.ly/1s4amLf or by texting ‘HEAD97 £5’ to 70070

- OU student top tip: “Never run out of tea or polos”
Book review: *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton

The Luminaries has one of its strengths in its eclectic cast of characters, from nefarious sea captain Francis Carver, to the elusive romantic Emery Staines, whose mysterious disappearance is linked inextricably to opium addict, Anna Wetherell, a prostitute well known to the goldminers in Hokitika.

There is also a mystery surrounding the hermit Crosbie Wells, and as with most characters in this narrative, we come to learn more about his past endeavours as the narrative nears its conclusion, so, while the mysteries are long sustained by Catton, it makes their unravelling all the more satisfying as the book progresses.

Despite its 832 pages, the book doesn’t seem long enough to quench one’s thirst for the lives and complexities of these characters.

By Carys Peasgood, OU student

Music review: *The Voice Squad*

The Voice Squad are a capella trio comprising of Fran McPhail, Phil Callery, and my old Biology teacher from school in Drogheda, Gerry Cullen.

Their latest album ‘Concerning of three young men’ is an immediate pleasure to anyone who enjoys carefully crafted folk singing.

The themes of the songs as you might expect cover, among others, love, loss, war and emigration.

But this all male group achieve a degree of delicacy and emotion in their performance that transcends the maudlin or the sentimental.

Serious themes are balanced by the beauty of the music and the skill of the performers - a valuable listening experience.

By Emma Mullen, OU student

Get in touch!

Have you read an amazing book lately? Fallen in love with a new album or created something OU student-related like @ginzandtonic?

Well, get in touch and share your experiences with your fellow OU students!

Email: ousa@open.ac.uk

Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “Putting on sun screen to study. #studentproblems”
The Oddest Place I’ve studied...

We asked you to tell us about the oddest places you’ve ever done OU study and here’s what you said:

In the sky...

Last year, I turned 40. I decided that to celebrate my birthday I would take a holiday to The Dominican Republic.

I was aware of the long flight out and back from the UK and with the EMA for E891 looming I decided to use my aero-plane time wisely. I prepared my notes etc. before my flight and wrote my EMA whilst in the sky.

I had several comments from the cabin crew interested in what I was writing and on touch down in the UK one flight attendant even checked that I had finished! A lovely way to make a long journey fly by (and the view was gorgeous too!)

By Karina Shaw,
OU student

Just after having a baby...

I registered for my first course in 2005 and found out I was expecting my youngest daughter shortly after it started in February 2006.

My final TMA for A103 was handwritten in hospital just after she was born. I was in a maternity unit in Peterhead, north of Aberdeen and the midwives looked after Karah so that I could get it written and my husband drove to Aberdeen to put it through my tutors letterbox!

By Karen Norris,
OU student

Before an operation...

I had to go into hospital for an operation and took my death and dying study books which amused the staff no end!

I have also taken my counselling exploring fear and sadness books on a cruise ship whilst sailing around the Fjords.

An OU student studies here, there and anywhere...

By Sue Charles,
OU student

In a wedding gazebo...

I utilised the wedding gazebo (see picture below) at a Hotel in Jamaica, perfect shaded cover in 30 degrees with an electrical point for my laptop. Views of the Caribbean sea and palm trees from the desk!

I wrote my last A230 TMA there. Haven’t had the feedback yet so I can’t tell you if was beneficial!

By Neil Crothall,
OU student

Get in touch!

If you’ve studied in an odder place, let us know!
Email: ousa@open.ac.uk

We’re actually thinking about writing a book...

• Best overheard #OUstudent comment: “Almost finished my journey. 6 years all over soon”
Your voice...

As your Students Association, we love to hear from you and as your student voice we want to know what’s good and what’s bad about being an OU student. It’s your magazine!

In every edition we feature a wide range of student stories so write in and let us know what’s on your mind.

Here’s what you had to say...

Be kind to your tutors

In response to the anonymous OU student who wrote complaining about their tutor.

I’m a mature OU student so appreciate the ups and down of studying, juggling family life and my shift work. However sitting at the other end of the table where I do my studying is my darling husband who is an OU tutor for a different faculty (he also did his degree with the OU) and so I felt a little miffed of this criticism.

The OU tutors work incredibly hard with more and more being asked of them by both the students and the OU as financial cutbacks take hold. Yes they are employed to do a job but if you take their wages and divide it by the number of hours they put in, it is well below minimum wage but because they are dedicated they do it.

I can guarantee you everything you need to know about your course is on the website. In my mind the OU are fantastic about making sure everything we need to study is there and failing that there is always student support.

Those assignments we submit before Christmas means they mark them during Christmas and New Year so our family time is limited and I’ve lost count the number of times we have to try and plan a holiday considering cut off dates and other aspects of our life.

Be kind to the tutors, you will not receive this level of support at a red brick uni and will pay considerably more.

Anonymous OU student

The OU tutors work incredibly hard with more and more being asked of them by both the students and the OU as financial cutbacks take hold. Yes they are employed to do a job but if you take their wages and divide it by the number of hours they put in, it is well below minimum wage but because they are dedicated they do it.

I can guarantee you everything you need to know about your course is on the website. In my mind the OU are fantastic about making sure everything we need to study is there and failing that there is always student support.

Those assignments we submit before Christmas means they mark them during Christmas and New Year so our family time is limited and I’ve lost count the number of times we have to try and plan a holiday considering cut off dates and other aspects of our life.

Be kind to the tutors, you will not receive this level of support at a red brick uni and will pay considerably more.

Anonymous OU student

New DSA Assessment Centre opens in Northern Ireland

MTS Sulby in collaboration with the Open University have opened the first DSA QAG accredited assessment centre in Northern Ireland, supporting local students with a disability and staff needing additional support in the workplace with up to date information and assessment services.

The Open University has played a key role in the creation of the fully equipped assessment centre where people with a disability can come and trial the various supports available to them through schemes like the Disabled Students Allowance and Access to Work.

As well as offering a service to students studying with the OU the centre will be available to all local students with a disability who are in receipt of a DSA award.

The centre is now open for referrals and welcomes enquiries from students with a disability in receipt of a DSA award to make contact to book a DSA assessment.

Referrals can be made by email on access-centre@open.ac.uk by Telephone: 0300 303 8683 or via our website: www.open.ac.uk/students/disability/access-centre/

DSA Plans

I am absolutely horrified at the plans to cut DSA allowances. I had one for the last few courses of my degree and I know I wouldn’t have been able to continue without it.

As my assessor explained, ‘This isn’t about giving you anything extra, it’s about levelling the playing field a bit so you can play on equal terms.’ And he was exactly right. I graduated with a first class honours degree - and without the help I had from the DSA I couldn’t even have finished!

Without the help from the DSA I know I would not have any degree at all. I don’t want to be one of the last to benefit - everyone deserves a chance!

Jeanette Maggs, OU student

Please read our update regarding changes to the Disabled Students Allowance on page 4.
Help needed to set-up and create a new vibrant Health and Social Care Society

OU students Nicola Simpson and Tammy Carroll asked us to feature a request to other students who would like to help start a new society, here’s their message:

Are you studying towards a qualification in Health and Social Care or interested in Health and Social Care Issues? Would you like to join a society which supports individuals in their H&SC studies and careers? If so then read on!

Our aim is to create a society open to all students, staff and alumni of the Open University. We believe a society can create a supportive environment which enriches the distance learning experience and reduce feelings of isolation.

We hope to create a network of individuals who can support each other and provide insight into different roles and life experiences.

Initially we plan to hold weekly online discussions on current issues in Health and Social Care. As we become more organised we may hold face to face events, such as inviting voluntary organisations or academics to speak to us about their work.

You may like to join us as a member or may be interested in helping to run the society, for example; helping to create a web page, being a regional coordinator and organising face to face meetings in your region or by becoming an online administrator on our facebook page.

Please email the Association at ousa@open.ac.uk or join us on facebook at http://on.fb.me/1negQUR if you are interested in helping to create a vibrant OU Health and Social Care Society.

OUPS September revision weekend

Have you booked your place at the next Open University Psychological Society’s (OUPS) September Revision weekend?

The weekend offers revision and exam help for those about to sit exams and also a fascinating weekend about SDK228 - ‘The science of the mind: investigating mental health,’ which is open to anyone with an interest in the subject matter, not just for those studying the module.

Revision Weekend: DSE212; DD307 and DD303

Date: 5th-7th September
Venue: Warwick University

This is an intensive weekend (a total of nine 90 minute sessions) for each of the above courses. For more details go to: http://www.oups.org.uk/component/content/article/16

SDK228 Springboard Weekend: 'The science of the mind: investigating mental health'

Date: 5th-7th September
Venue: Warwick University

Ideal for students about to start SDK228 but will also be of interest to anyone who is interested in mental health issues.

For more details go to: http://bit.ly/1oUJWOF

These weekends are not all hard work; they’re also great social events, offering a face to face student experience and a chance to mix with tutors and psychologists.

Astronomical Society contact update

Thanks for spotting that the link to the Astronomical Society’s email address didn’t work.

To make-up for our mistake we’ve got all the society’s contact details below.

Forum: http://bit.ly/1negiON
Facebook: http://on.fb.me/1qtjhEf
Twitter: https://twitter.com/OUSAAC1
Email: ousa.astronomicalcommunity@outlook.com

Thank you for keeping us on our toes!
Could you be a Hotline Volunteer for Nightline?

“Every mind is a world, and for a few minutes, every caller feels like they’ve been able to share their world. It’s an honour to step into so many worlds.”

Hotline Volunteer for Nightline

The Students Association has recently linked up with Nightline, a confidential listening service operating through the night, run by students for students.

Nightline’s Hotline will be available to OU students for the very first time this autumn. To make this possible, we are now recruiting OU student volunteers, in the Greater London area to join the Hotline team at their London base and help to take those calls starting October.

Hotline volunteers are offered excellent training and continuous support. They need to be good listeners, non-judgemental, empathetic and able to adapt to a vast variety of calls from OU students nationwide as well as students from universities and colleges all over London.

It’s a great opportunity to be part of a fantastic team, while helping to provide a vital service and gain some new skills.

Registration is now open and you can apply to be considered for one of these exciting roles by clicking the button below.

Register here

After training volunteers commit to:
• 12 overnight shifts each academic year
• Evening top-up training sessions as required

Important Dates

Introduction and Information Talk
6pm – 7pm Wednesday 1st October
University of London Building
Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HY

Pre-selection Training:
(Trainees choose one of these Groups)
• Sunday Group: October 5th 12th &
  19th 3pm – 6pm
• Tuesday Group: Oct 7th 14th & 21st
  6pm – 9pm
• Wednesday Group Oct 8th 15th &
  22nd 6pm – 9pm
• Thursday Group Oct 9th 16th & 23nd
  6pm – 9pm

Post Selection Weekend Training
(All selected volunteers attend both sessions.)
• Saturday October 25th 10am – 6pm
• Sunday October 26th 10am – 6pm

Also required
Nightline Publicity and Fundraising Volunteers. Contact: volunteering@nightline.org.uk any time to say you’d like to get involved. For any enquiries in the first instance contact wendy.burrell@open.ac.uk

The results are in...

The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) are in and we’re delighted to announce that for the second year running student satisfaction with us, your OU Students Association, has risen by 3% – meaning that overall satisfaction now stands at 64%, moving us up 11 places!

We’ve certainly been busy over the past 12 months to make this happen but we’re not going to stop there!

Our newly elected student officer team are working hard to make sure your Students Association is representing the views of students, promoting your interests and welfare, as well as providing more opportunities for personal development and social activities.

You don’t have to wait for the NSS to tell us your views – you can email us on ouusa@open.ac.uk, or find us on Facebook, Twitter and the OUSA Forums.

Note from the Editor: If you don’t want to receive future editions of OUstudents, unsubscribe by emailing your name and PI number to ouusa@open.ac.uk. The editorial team reserves the right to accept or reject any article submitted to the OUstudents magazine and to edit submitted articles in any way deemed appropriate and necessary. The majority of the articles are written by students, for students, therefore, we can not guarantee the original source of all articles.