



OU Student

Edited by

Lisa Carson

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The official publication of the Open University Students Association

Letter from the editor...

Life in the fast lane?

ON a recent flight on route to Walton Hall I was reading the in-flight magazine. One of the articles debated the issue of retirement age and related issues. I came away with the impression of two potential journeys through life. The first journey being the fast lane from school via work to retirement maybe with the occasional parallel life event but a straightforward journey with a plan. The alternative or second journey was considerably more flexible with the aim of going somewhere but without being too sure of the destination which allows for "moving in and out of careers, with periods of rest and retraining". It is possible that all the travelling was affecting my thinking! However, I could relate this to the history of The Open University, being an Open University student and my personal journey.

When The Open University came into existence it was innovative in that it was open to all without entry requirements and gave the opportunity to retrain and change career. At this time the brick universities were expecting their students straight from school in a natural progression. Society has changed and the 'traditional' universities are expanding into distance and part-time learning while at the same time the demographic of the OU is changing with young students wishing to study with The Open University for their first degree. The OU cannot stand still and a major initiative which is in progress is the Student Support Review. This is a

long process which could have a significant impact on how students will be supported throughout their journey with the OU in the future.

The question is often asked "what does OUSA do for me?" and having a student involved in discussion of the Student Support Review at every opportunity is part of what OUSA does for you. The review is being discussed in every region and throughout the University committee structure. OUSA is involved by ensuring the student view is listened to. We have student representatives on as many committees as possible to make certain that the student point of view is heard on every possible occasion. We have a short report from one of the students who attended a recent workshop in this issue. How do they represent all students? Each year at the annual Conference the motions are debated and voted on and the resulting policies are published in the 'Register of Decisions', which can be downloaded from the OUSA website, www.ousa.org.uk (Find out more about being a Central Representative in *Education Matters*.)

"The OU cannot stand still"

So the journey options open to us as students are expanding and the student population is becoming more diverse. If you stop to think about it the task is becoming more of a challenge. So how does OUSA truly represent this membership which is constantly changing? This is a question that I intend to explore with the Executive Committee of OUSA around the time this issue of *OU Student* will be arriving through your letterbox. I believe we have an opportunity to examine what is keeping us tethered

and enable us to explore how to move forward. There are many aspects to OUSA from representing the student views to providing and negotiating

services such as the new NUS Extra card, which you can read about in **sesame**, or the management of a social environment on FirstClass.

This brings me to my personal journey. I started studying with the OU in 2002 with the ambition of working towards attaining my degree, a fairly straight forward journey. I've taken advantage of the flexibility of an OU degree to take short courses and study topics that were never intended and through getting involved in OUSA I have acquired skills and confidence that I never expected to. My journey has taken me on quite a detour and I intend to enjoy and learn from the experience as I put these skills to good use leading the Association on its journey into the future.

LISA CARSON

OUSA PRESIDENT



IN BRIEF

Zarnecki talk

PROFESSOR John Zarnecki spoke at the OUSA Conference to enthralled students about some of the results achieved by the European Space Agency's Huygens probe in which he was a principal investigator. The picture that he donated to OUSA for fundraising, which was a colour image of the rocky surface of Titan, was enthusiastically received and highly sought after and now proudly hangs on a student's wall. Professor Zarnecki has generously donated a second picture, which will be used to raise more money for the student charity. Vice-President, Student Support welcomes any interesting fundraising ideas that OUSA members might like to propose. Contact her in the usual way with your thoughts.

Student Support Review

THE Open University is currently conducting a major review of student support. The review encompasses the whole learning experience. The University wants to be able to provide a flexible response to students' support needs from their first course.

In the first phase, evidence was collated from students, academic lecturers, academic and non-academic staff. This phase offered OUSA the opportunity to contribute with our education and student support policy. Once the first report was presented for the OU Senate, Will Swann (Director, Students) and Pro Vice-Chancellor Brigid Heywood (Staff and Research) took their 'Roadshow' around the regions. All students were invited to attend and feed their views into the next stage of the review.

We are currently in Phase 2 which is looking at the options available to bring the aims of the Review to fruition. A number of workshops are taking place for associate lecturers and staff in faculties and regions to map out the processes from inception of a course to the student receiving their degree. A number of students have also attended the workshops (see report on the Modelling Workshops).

Your chance to contribute to this stage of the Review is via the SSR Exchange available from OU Students Association > OUSA Live from your FirstClass Desktop and information is also available from the review website: www.open.ac.uk/student-support-review/index.shtml There is a copy of the second report presented to Senate in June which includes a number of propositions to comment on. Go and have your say!

Good news for disabled students

NEW rules for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) now mean that more students will be eligible to receive support.

Until now, students had to be studying at least 60 credit points in an academic year to qualify. But due to a change in regulations the points threshold has been reduced to just 30 for new students, opening up funding opportunities for many more students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties.

Helen Maxwell, manager, DSA Office says: "We are committed to making higher education as accessible as possible, so it's very important to us that students get all the support they are entitled to. By lowering the points threshold students will have more flexibility in how they plan the timing of their study. DSAs are not means-tested, so if you have a disability or learning difficulty and are a new student studying 30 points or more from October, we encourage you to get in touch."

Twice the time

Students still need to show they are aiming to complete their course in twice the time of a full-time equivalent. So if you do only study 30 points one year you will need to plan how you will catch up in the future. For example, students will usually study 60 points a year over six years to obtain a bachelors degree, so if you drop to 30 points one year you will need to make up the additional 30 points over what is left of your period of eligibility. The DSA Office will take into account how you have studied in the past, and as long as you satisfy the set criteria you will still qualify for your allowance.

DSAs are designed to help

students with a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty (for example dyslexia) to meet the extra study costs which are a direct result of their condition. They are awarded in addition to any other financial support that students might be eligible for, including fee grant and course grant.

Needs assessment

Students who disclose their disability to The Open University are automatically invited to apply for a DSA. If they meet the required

eligibility criteria, the OU arranges a needs assessment, which is carried

out by an independent, fully qualified assessor. They will meet the student and take into account how their condition will affect their ability to study the course they have chosen. Based on what they find, the assessor will submit recommendations for the DSA awards officers to approve. This may include allowances for specialist equipment (such as radio aids, low vision aids, scanners and special keyboards), non-medical helpers, an annual general allowance, and extra travel costs related to study.

Qualify

The new 30-point threshold applies to courses beginning in or after October 2007. If you think you could qualify for a Disabled Students' Allowance, and you haven't already heard from the DSA Office, you can contact them at: The DSA Office, The Open University, Hammerwood Gate, Kents Hill, Milton Keynes MK7 6BR. Voice telephone: 01908 654136, textphone: 01908 659955, fax 01908 659955, email DSA-Queries@open.ac.uk

"DSAs are not means-tested"

Introducing our new Officers

LAURA MURPHY, DEPUTY PRESIDENT

LAURA began studying with the OU in 1998. She recently completed a BSc, which she is aiming to upgrade to a BSc (Hons).

She has served as treasurer and secretary of her local Dublin branch and two terms as Executive Committee Member (ECM) for Republic of Ireland. During her time on the Executive Committee, OUSA in the Republic of Ireland has gone from a dormant entity to one where over half the branches are active and the interests of students are represented to both the Open University in Ireland, and further centrally.



She says: "The Deputy President's position is primarily to support the President, and I feel that this is something I am well placed to do, having worked alongside the current President for almost three years, on both OUSA and OU Committees (regionally and centrally), and I will provide all the support and assistance required during the year ahead, working with her as she brings OUSA forward into the 21st century."

RITA WILLIAMS VICE-PRESIDENT, COMMUNICATIONS

RITA began studying with the OU in 2004 and became active within OUSA in 2006. She is Chair of her local London branch and Regional Forum. She says that "it is obvious to many people that communications within OUSA leave a lot to be desired and, after Conference fired my passion, I feel I am ready to take on the challenge".

"The role of VP Communications is a huge one, and never been attempted before. I believe that effective communication is the job of every member of the EC, and to this end I hope to be able to demonstrate that open, honest communications can lead to a new era of success for OUSA, and that by conference next year, more people will know who we are and what we do," adds Rita.



EDUCATION MATTERS

Central Representation for OUSA

THE University 2006-7 committee year has ended and the new committee year commenced on 1 September.

The Association is very fortunate in being invited by the University to provide representation on all of the University's major governance committees – a rather greater degree of representation than is offered to students at most contemporary universities. This is possibly related to the fact that OU students come from a far broader range of backgrounds than those at most other universities and the University values having views from as many perspectives as possible.

Along with the benefits, however, there is one big snag. The University is at Milton Keynes and the students are widely dispersed - accordingly attendance at meetings during a normal working week places a considerable onus on those who offer to act as central representatives in this way.

This year, we advertised widely on forums that we believed would attract the

attention of those who might be prepared to help in this way and so far nearly 40 students have offered their help. They will offer the consensus student viewpoint to the University, contribute in a positive manner to policy development of the University and bring information back to OUSA.

While most of the student seats have been filled, there are still some vacancies. In addition, other vacancies do occur during the year as there are often short-term working groups, programme workshops and sub-committees set up. Applications are welcomed throughout the year.

Many representatives remark how such activities give an extra dimension to their studies and help them to understand the 'why' as well as the 'wherefore' – so it's not a matter of all 'give' by the volunteers. Although there is no payment for participation, expenses (travel and subsistence) are reimbursed by the University for all official representation and, where necessary, appropriate special

facilities can be made available.

What is needed of a representative is reliability, an ability to understand what the consensus student view is (a representative is not there to present his/her own view) and an ability to produce promptly a brief report about what was discussed at the meeting.

Obviously, for anything involving a specific faculty, some previous experience in that faculty is essential but this does not mean that a successful representative needs a vast number of points from that faculty, and for programme workshops, in particular, a measure of 'freshness' to the subject could be an advantage.

Any students who would like to help their fellow students in the Association, the University, and themselves by acting as a representative should get in touch with the OUSA Office and a form will be sent to you.

It's over to you – we need the information that you can bring and you can be assured in return of an interesting session which we hope will be relevant to your journey through The Open University.

Dates for your diary

If you would like to see your event advertised here, please contact the OUSA Office. Deadline for the next issue of *OU Student* is 15 October.

Central Events

South Regional Forum *The announced date of the AGM for South Regional Forum of 15 September has had to be changed due to extenuating circumstances.* The AGM for the region will therefore now be held on Saturday 10 November 2007 at Queen Mary College, Basingstoke commencing at 10.30am. All branches in South Region are asked to note and act on this change of date.

Local Events

Altrincham & Sale Branch *Second Tuesday of every month*, 8.30pm, Famous Old Porterhouse, Stamford New Road, Altrincham. Details Edna: edna@fdsnorthern.com

Bath Branch *Second Wednesday of every month*, 8pm, Crystal Palace Tavern, 10 - 11 Abbey Green, Bath. Details Nina: ndh46@student.open.ac.uk

Belgium Branch *First Monday of every month*, Brussels. Details Mike: mrd42@student.open.ac.uk

Bournemouth & Poole Branch *First Thursday of every month*, 8.30pm, Grasshopper Pub, Poole Rd, Lower Parkstone, Poole. Details Neil Walking: neil.walking@ntlworld.com

Brighton, Hove & Lewes Branch *First Monday of every month*, 7.30pm, Cricketers Pub, Black Lion Street, Brighton. Details Colin: cp438@student.open.ac.uk

Bristol Branch *First Wednesday of every month*, 8.30pm, Horts City Tavern, Broad Street, Bristol. Details Kate: 0117 955 1992. Web: www.ousabristol.org.uk

Cambridge Branch *First Wednesday of each month*, 8pm, Panton Arms, Coronation Street, Cambridge. Details Peter: plc38@student.open.ac.uk

Cheltenham Branch *Second Wednesday of every month*, 8pm, Norwood Arms, Leckhampton Rd, Cheltenham. Details Chris: ceb8@student.open.ac.uk

Chippenham Branch *Second Thursday of every month*, 7.30pm, Pheasant Public House, Chippenham, (corner of A4 & Hungerdown Lane). Details Pauline Lock: paulinelen@pau-lin.freemove.co.uk Web: <http://imprimis.madasafish.com/OUSACHippingham>

Doncaster Branch *First Wednesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Salutation Inn, South Parade, Doncaster. Details Andrew: aje269@student.open.ac.uk

Dorset Branch *Relaxed day and evening meetings.* Details Natasha: natasha_sims@beeb.net

Exeter Branch *Third Wednesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Mill-on-the-Exe, Exeter. Details Alison: 07971 954392, or ae2463@student.open.ac.uk or FirstClass branch conference.

Flyde Branch *First Wednesday of every month*, 8 - 10pm,

Number 3 Public House, Devonshire Square. Details Andrew: 01253 891121.

Gloucester Branch *First Thursday of every month*, 8.00pm, The Fountain Inn, Westgate Street, Gloucester. Details Andrew: 01453 757445.

Guildford Branch *Thursday 27 September*, 7.45pm, Spectrum (Ice Skating/Bowling evening). Details of forthcoming events: guildfordousa@yahoo.co.uk or via the website: www.guildfordousa.org

Gwent Branch Details Celia: cpw73@student.open.ac.uk or 01633 483423.

Haverfordwest Branch *First Thursday of every month*, 7.30pm, Haverfordwest Cricket Club, Dale Road, Haverfordwest, Pems. Details Mair Kromrei: gmk64@open.ac.uk or mair.kromrei1@btinternet.com or 07880 767266.

Huddersfield Branch *Third Wednesday of every month*, 7pm, Huddersfield University, Howard Wilson Building, Room HWG03. Details Helen: hb2598@student.open.ac.uk

Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds Branch Details: www.ousasuffolk.org.uk

Kendal Branch *First Monday of every month*, 7.30pm, Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal. Details Brian Wright: 01539 621567.

Lancaster Branch *Third Wednesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Bar of Gregson Institute, Moor Lane, Lancaster. Details Sybil: smr456@student.open.ac.uk

Liverpool Branch *Last Wednesday of every month*, 8pm, Wetherspoons (The Richard John Blacker), Great Charlotte Street, Liverpool. Details Kath: 07968 576491 or kathmckevitt@byinternet.com

London Region *Sunday 23 September*, visit to Fulham Palace, meet at East Putney station, 10.45am.

Saturday 3 November, Pub lunch at The George, Borough High Street London Bridge, 12 noon. Details: www.ousalondon.org.uk

Manchester Branch *Second Tuesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Lass O'Gowire, Charles St, Manchester. Details Gavin: gavin.tomlinson@btinternet.com

Newbury Branch *First Wednesday of every month*, 7.30pm. Details Russell: rs3562@student.open.ac.uk Web: www.ousa-newbury.rsmithers.net

Newcastle Branch *Last Tuesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Toby Carvery, Kingston Park, Newcastle. Details Edythe: 0191 2421142.

Northampton Branch *Second Wednesday of every month*, 8.30pm, The Fish, Fish Street, Northampton. Details Cristina: 07796471908 or acc254@student.open.ac.uk

Northwich Branch *Second Wednesday of every month*. Details Kath: kmm32@student.open.ac.uk

Oxford, Abingdon & Witney Branch *Fourth Thursday of every*

month, 8pm, Rosie O'Grady's, Park End Street, Oxford. Details Tracey: ta85@student.open.ac.uk Web: www.ousa-oxford.org.uk

Plymouth Branch *Third Tuesday of every month*. Winifred Baker Court, Addison Rd, North Hill, Plymouth. Details Pat: ousaplymouth@yahoo.co.uk

Portsdown Branch *First Wednesday of every month*, 7.30pm, Toby Carvery, Copnor Rd, Hilsea. Details Val: vam44@student.open.ac.uk

Rochdale Branch *Last Thursday of every month*, 7.30pm, Millers, Hollingworth Lake, Littlebrough. Details Gill: gill@kilshaw94@freemove.co.uk

Sheffield Branch *Last Tuesday of every month*, 7pm, Ruskins, Tudor Square, Sheffield. Details Lucy: lc2935@student.open.ac.uk

Southend Branch *First Thursday of every month*, 7.45pm, Alexander House, opp Southend Victoria Railway Station, Southend-on-Sea. Details Albert: albert.beaven@blueyonder.co.uk

Stockport Branch *Second Thursday every month*, 8pm, The Unity pub, Wellington Rd, Stockport. Details Jane: jane@isparp.co.uk Web: <http://aips.mine.nu/ousa>

Weald Branch *Third Wednesday of every month*, 7pm, The Humphrey Bean Pub, Tonbridge High Street. Details Norman: wealdousa@yahoo.co.uk or 07967 245939 Web: www.wealdousa.org.uk/

West Cumbria Branch *Last Thursday of every month*, 7.30pm, The Howgate Inn (on the A595 between Whitehaven and Workington). Details Tony: parkerstbees@aol.com

Wirral Branch Details Laura: ljb526@student.open.ac.uk

York Branch *Third Wednesday of every month*, 7 - 9pm, St Johns College, Lord Mayors Walk, York. Details Elizabeth: ebc34@student.open.ac.uk

Affiliated Societies

Open University Psychological Society (OUPS)

Details for all events on the website: www.oups.org.uk
OUPS Conference, Saturday 10 November, "Images of Childhood", London SW1. Details Lynda: lyndarochester@hotmail.com

OUPS Conference, Saturday 17 November, "Careers in Psychology", University of Reading. Details Dominic: dacrehan@hotmail.com

OUPS Reading, pub meeting, first Thursday of every month, 8pm, Reading RG4. Details Dominic: dacrehan@hotmail.com

OUPS Ringwood, pub meeting, second Thursday of every month, 8pm, Ringwood BH24. Details Sally: sallyannjruk1@aol.com

OUPS Maidenhead, pub meeting, third Thursday of every month, 8pm Holyport SL6. Details Phil: pj863@student.open.ac.uk

OUPS London, pub meeting, last Thursday of every month, 8:30pm, East Sheen SW14. Details Denise: denisemward@aol.com

Stimulating interest

THE Guildford and Woking OUSA branch has been active for four years. We meet each month in a different venue/activity across our area to try and facilitate access and stimulate interest for as many students as possible. Recent events have included: ten pin bowling, meals out, pub quizzes, games night, laser quest and our favourite annual event; the spooky Ghost Walk of Guildford (pictured left) which is acted out especially for us by a former OU student.

There are usually 10-20 students at our events and some strong friendships have been formed over the years. In the words of student Emma Pressnell who attended one of our events for the first time in March: "...the group were so friendly and put me at ease. I was soon having a fantastic time and forgot that I had just met them. They made me feel extremely welcome and told me they were extremely pleased to see me there."

We also welcome students to our online OUSA branch FirstClass conference and we ensure that all students are able to



contribute to the running of the branch and in future plans. Our website www.guildfordousa.org is kept up to date with photos, newsletters and information

about events and we would welcome contact with students in our branch area or neighbouring areas.

Justine Cornforth, Chair, Guildford branch

Student Support Review workshop

A MONDAY in June found me sitting with two other students in a large hall in Milton Keynes surrounded by well over a hundred members of the Phase 2 Student Support Review Modeling Teams. It was the beginning of a two-day workshop on the Student Support Review and we were there to put the students' viewpoint and to ask all the awkward questions we could think of.

After brief presentations by Will Swann, the OU Director, Students and the project

team leaders, we divided into groups, based on either faculties or regions, and set to work on the theme assigned to each group. I was in the Nation Regions group and our task was to decide which aspects of student support were specific to any one of the Nation Regions. Every couple of hours we regrouped in the main hall to report our progress, receive information and above all to ask questions.

Group work continued on day two culminating in each group presenting, for discussion, a poster setting out their

findings. These posters will be the basis of each group's continuing work over the summer.

It was a remarkable experience; a meeting of all factions of our University, working together, to try to ensure that the support the university offers to students meets the needs of all concerned.

Will it work? I don't know the answer to that yet, but one thing is certain; if it doesn't, it won't be for want of trying.

Marianne Cantieri, Executive Committee Member for Southern Europe

OU Student, the publication of the Open University Students Association, is edited by the OUSA President. Most of the articles are written by students of the University. It is produced on OUSA's behalf by the Communications department of The Open University. Editorial enquiries and contributions should be addressed to: Als Ryan, Open University Students Association, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE. Telephone: +44 (0) 1908 652026 Fax: +44 (0)1908 654326 Email: ousa@student.open.ac.uk OUSA website: www.ousa.org.uk

IF YOU WANT INFORMATION ABOUT OUSA PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM

NUS EXTRA CARD

The NUS Extra Card is available now for all current OU students. Still only £10 for a year subscription, but with access to more discounts, and a broader range than ever before. The Card also incorporates the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) currently worth £7 yearly, giving access to more discounts in the UK and around the world plus excellent savings on travel including international flights. The NUS Extra Card will be accepted as valid student identification on your travels and at your OU exams. You can also enter competitions, apply for special offers and receive discount updates all online. For more details of the amazing range of discounts on offer and to apply for your card go to www.nusextra.co.uk Important to note: This card lasts from September to the following August. Applications are only available on line. All you need is a photo to upload and your credit or debit card to hand. Make sure you know your OU Student personal identity (PI) number for current student verification.

Ouset DONATION

Ouset, The Open University Students Educational Trust, is a registered charity, administered by OUSA, and is designed to help Open University students in financial need. Its funds are almost entirely generated by donations and fundraising activities of fellow students. Any donation is welcome.

REPRESENTATIVES ON CENTRAL COMMITTEES

If you are interested in representing your fellow students on Open University central committees and boards, please tick the box.

SUPPORT LINKS

Tick the box for further details about becoming a Student Support Link, Disabled Student Link or Student Academic Link (circle area of interest).

REPRESENTATIVES AT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

If you are interested in being a rep at residential schools in the future, please tick the box for a recruitment pack and application form.

DISABLED STUDENTS GROUP

This group is open to all those disabled students interested in helping OUSA to achieve its equality policy. Please tick the box if you are interested in receiving details of how to register with the Disabled Students Group.

GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Tick the box for details of how you can represent OUSA at an OU Graduation ceremony.

OU STUDENT MEMBERSHIP CARD

Whilst all students are automatically members of OUSA, we do provide a free membership card. This may secure discounts from some retailers and service providers, and counts as identification for OU Exams. Please send in one passport sized photograph, proof of student identity/correspondence from the OU with your PI number on and a 2nd class stamp for return of your card (or alternatively enclose 20p). Documents will be returned with your card

Please allow 28 days for delivery of all OUSA Services.

ORDER FORM

OUSA information is recorded on computer. OUSA is registered under the Data Protection Act.

Name _____ Student Number _____ Region _____ Catchment Area Number _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Daytime Tel No _____

Signature _____

Date _____

I include a donation to Ouset.

Please send completed form and enclosures to:

OUSA Office, (OUS22), PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6BE Fax: +44 (0)1908 654326.