



Edited by

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The official publication of the Open University Students Association

Lisa Carson

## Changing times

In writing for my final OU Student of the OUSA year I am struck by two things. Firstly how quickly a year can go by and secondly by how much can happen in a year. In OUSA this is particularly the case when you spend the first part of the year working out what you've taken on and the later part of the year preparing for the annual Conference. This is a challenge that all your elected representatives face. My year has been particularly earth shattering having taken on the role of President quite suddenly and just as I was starting a project looking at a major review of OUSA the news on the Equivalent and Lower Qualifications (ELQ) policy landed. At this point I cannot be sure whether I will be writing here again as the post of President, along with all the other Officer posts, will be subject to an election at Conference. Details of your opportunity to submit hustings questions are included in this issue.

It has been clear from the inspirational Student Stories that have been received that studying with the Open University has a major impact on many lives. These stories proved valuable when submitting evidence to both the HEFCE consultation and the DIUS Select Committee Enquiry on behalf of OUSA. I was able to present the very real impact of the

Governments ELQ policy and leave the University to fight with the facts and figures. The ELQ issue is still bubbling away and with the exception of a few minor concessions for some disabled students and students resident in Northern Ireland, the policy still remains. We still deplore the policy to remove any funding and particularly for students who are re-skilling for a wide range of reasons. The University is looking at possible actions to mitigate the consequences and the challenge for OUSA is to know what our students really think.

**Have you signed the petition yet?**

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/ELQFunding/>

**Title**

Representing the views of OU students is one of the objectives of OUSA. I asked you last time to think about the question "What would make OUSA relevant to you?" I hope you did think about this as now is the time for you to send us your "Answers on a Postcard" as part of the **OUSA Futures** project. As you will see elsewhere in this issue there are various ways for you to do this. This is a real opportunity for you to say what OUSA can do to move itself forward and make itself relevant. It is often easier to

find fault with what isn't done but to shape the Association for the future it is important for us to build a picture of **What OUSA does get right?** and **How OUSA can improve for the future?** These are real questions that I hope will be answered by the OUSA Futures project and help shape the Association for the future.

I have realised in the last few months how passionately I feel about the right for everyone to have access to education for all. Whether or not I am President after conference remains to be seen but I will still be a student of this University and the incoming Executive Committee will be charged with looking after my interests as a student. Whoever is representing us as students of the Open University I wish them well for the future whatever shape it may be.



**LISA CARSON**  
**OUSA PRESIDENT**

# OUSA Futures

**“I am not going to lead this Association as if I am just caretaking it through a difficult spot in its history. I’m going to lead this organisation to a future where it is stronger, where it is more relevant to the thousands of students it represents and where it is more confident that it sits full square in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century rather than being afraid of leaving the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” Lisa Carson, O U S A President.**

We're on a mission to create an OU Students Association for the future and we're asking for your help. So where do we start? If we go back to basics OUSA has a set of objectives which are the foundation on which it has been built. I believe that these objectives are still relevant and although we may want to revisit them at some stage, for now I want your thoughts on how OUSA can and should meet these objectives.

## The Objectives of OUSA

### To foster a corporate identity for its members and all students of the Open University

What is the student identity? What can we do to encourage a united outlook while celebrating our diversity? How can we promote our presence to all students?

### To defend the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances

What affects access to education? Where are the barriers? How can we best protect the principle of open-ness?

### To co-ordinate the organisation of social and welfare activities for its members and all students

Which aspects of welfare are relevant? What social activities do you want? Is the regional structure sufficient?

### To promote and represent the educational interests of all students as members of the University

How do we keep up to date? What are the best interests of the students? What aspects are important?

### To promote the influence of students upon the operation and development of the University

How do we know what students want? How do we access student views? How can we make sure your voice is heard?

### To enable students to participate fully in their Association

How do students want to participate? What would attract you to participate? What stops you from participating now?

## Your Association, Your Future

We want your **“Answers on a Postcard”**; not just to the questions posed here, but to anything you think is relevant to O U S A as it is now, and how it should be for the future. If you are a pen and paper kind of person you can send your answers on a good old fashioned postcard, or use the tear-off strip below.

You may want to contribute via an e-postcard which will be posted on our online graffiti wall at <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p11.shtml>.

We will also be providing graffiti walls at conference and an open debate to allow people to contribute to the process in a way that they feel comfortable with. This is an opportunity for all members of the Association to contribute whether they currently feel engaged or not. Let us know what you really think, how we can all bring O U S A forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Answers on a Postcard

Please enter your feedback on OUSA in the postcard box below.

NAME: ----- PI NUMBER-----

**POSTCARD ANSWER:**

**Send your Postcard to: OUSA Futures**, Open University Students Association, PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE

**Data Protection** - The personal data you provide will be held by the OUSA Office, for the purposes of contacting you in relation to OUSA activities and events. Your details will not be passed on to a third party without your prior consent.

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## What is O U S A?

The Open University Students' Association was founded in 1972, with all current O U students automatically becoming members when they register for a course since 1977.

OUSA is a membership led organisation - run by students for students. We have a network of local branches and representatives throughout the O U regions, as well as operating centrally.

We aim to represent the views of O U students whatever they study and wherever they live. Our regional network enables us to ensure that student representatives are in a position of support and guidance for other students, and are able to channel the issues to those who can raise them directly with the university. In addition to our representative role we provide students with a social environment and space through our network of local branches and our large internet suite of social forums on FirstClass.

This social environment not only provides contact with other students, but also access to our representative function, giving students opportunities for personal and professional development opportunities.

To find out more, visit [www.ousa.org.uk](http://www.ousa.org.uk) or email [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk)

## O U S A Local Branches – There's one for everyone!

A sense of identity is important in many of life's situations – where you went to school, where you work, which football team to support or even which pub you frequent, all of these give you a sense of 'belonging' The same can be said for your local branch of the Open University Students Association.

As an individual student you may think that you have nothing in common with other OUSA members in your area apart from the fact that you are all studying with the OU – and you could be right – but there is really no way of finding out without making contact. Even if there is no one studying the same course or heading for the same degree, more than likely there will be someone who has useful tips of how to meet the dreaded TMA deadlines, how to use First Class, or share their experiences of where the courier left their last course books!

Branches are important to OUSA – they are the grassroots of the Association – as they enable important issues to be notified directly to the students and are a conduit for feedback between the OU and OUSA. Your local branch will be there for you whether you decide to take an active part or not. It doesn't take much time to look into a branch conference on First Class and send a message, and attending a monthly face to face meeting can be a great way of relieving stress. These are both great ways of compensating for the remoteness of distance learning. I hope that you can find the time to make contact – there are a lot of people about to take the same initial step, please join them.

### Did you know?

Branches and Regions can put information on the O U Life Screensaver. To find out more, contact Vice President Communications on First Class or email [ousao44@guest.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousao44@guest.open.ac.uk)

Many branches are currently inactive, so we are about to try to rectify this situation. (Details of how to find your branch are in the article called 'What is FirstClass?') If you don't know what your branch is, email [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk) or call 01908 654326 and we can tell you. All the branches to be regenerated are listed on our website, [www.ousa.org.uk](http://www.ousa.org.uk). Please look through the list to find your branch, and when the online meetings to regenerate your branch will take place. If your branch isn't listed, this means it is already active, but in any case, do pop along to the local online forum and say hi! You will find the local contact details for your region in the list, if you have any questions, or can't make the meeting, please do get in touch and make your views known. Every student matters to O U S A, so have your say, either through your branch, your region or through 'Answers on a Postcard'.

## Branch Announcements

The **Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders** branch will hold its AGM online from the 14th April, with a face to face meeting at the Foot of the Walk, Leith on the 15th, 8pm.

For further details, please call Carole on 013873 76254, or via [ousaecmscotland@gmail.com](mailto:ousaecmscotland@gmail.com).

**Guilford Branch.** Despite being a successful branch in the past, we are in danger of closing. We meet frequently for social events, but at the moment have no committee or officers to organise events. If you are interested in keeping this lively branch going, please contact Jenny on 07923 478 798 or email [ousao35@guest.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousao35@guest.open.ac.uk).

It is suggested that **St Austell and West Cornwall** branches merge to form a Cornwall branch. At the present time the St Austell branch is active, but the West Cornwall one is dormant

Meetings will be held in both branch conferences on First Class running from 8<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Will those students from these branch areas who want to join in this debate please contribute to the on-line meetings, or alternatively contact their Executive Committee Member, Roz Evans, on 01237 424 725 - eve and weekends - in order that their opinion can be taken into account. The result of this consultation will be published in the branch conferences at the end of the on-line meeting.

**Local Branches on FirstClass:** To find your regional Branch from your FirstClass desktop, click Open University, > O U Students Association, > O U S A Live. > O U S A Regions > Your Region > Your Branch

# What is FirstClass?

You may have seen mentions of O U S A's large suite of social and local regional forums, and might be wondering how you can access them. Well wonder no more, we are about to show you how! All you will need is your Open University Computer Username (O U C U) and password (as sent to you at the beginning of your course) and a connection to the internet.

There are two ways to connect to FirstClass, using a web browser, and with the client software. The instructions here refer to the web version, but if you would like to download the software, just go to <http://www.open.ac.uk/lts/software/firstclass.html> and follow the instructions.

Log in to Student Home at <http://www.open.ac.uk/students> and click the link on the left to "O U Mailbox". This takes you to your mailbox which is located on FirstClass. Clicking the "Desktop" link underneath the navigation bar gives you access to all the OUSA forums and OU forums.

## How to find your local regional forum.

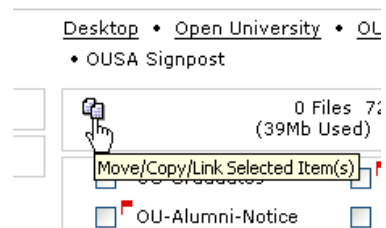
Each checkbox on the screen is a place you can visit in FirstClass. To find your regional forum from your desktop, click Open University, after that O U Students Association, and then O U S A Live. This is the main O U S A area on FirstClass, and you will see there are lots of areas for you to explore. To find your local regional forum, click O U S A Regions. The red flag means there are new messages posted since the last time you logged in. If this is your first time, there will be lots of red flags! From O U S A Regions, you will see a forum with some messages in, and an upper section with the Region names. Just click the name of your region and you are in! Post a message to say hi, and have a look for your local branch too.

## What is the Signpost?

The Signpost is the area on FirstClass where most of our forums are listed, in alphabetical order. If you want to chat with other Open University students about chess, or cats, or have a debate, you can find a forum in Signpost. To get there, go to OU Students Association, but click O U S A Signpost instead of O U S A Live, and nice long list of conferences will appear for you to take your pick from!

## How to add a forum to your desktop.

To place a forum on your desktop, tick the checkbox next to the forum you would like to put there. Go to the "two sheets of paper" icon at the top of the page & left click it. In the window that pops up, choose "Desktop" as the destination and click the "Link" button.



### **Need some help?**

Peer Support online might be what you need. For more details, visit

[http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p2\\_2.shtml](http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p2_2.shtml)

### **N U S Extra Card**

The N U S Extra Card is just £10 and includes the I S I C card too! Accepted nationally, you could soon be saving heaps of cash on everything from food to books! Visit <http://www.nusextra.co.uk> to apply.

### **Want the latest news?**

Keep up with the latest O U S A news with an R S S feed direct to your email inbox. Visit the O U S A News page [here](#), and click 'subscribe'.

# OUSA Annual Conference



Conference is OUSA's biggest face to face event in the calendar and is where the Association's policy is decided. Throughout the year, when OUSA's Central Representatives sit on the various Open University Committees, they are guided by the OUSA Conference policy. It is how the student voice is heard.

This year, Conference will take place over the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> April, and is on our very own campus in Milton Keynes. As well as debating and deciding policy, various other events will be happening. We will have two guest speakers; The N U S President Gemma Tumelty, and the Minister of State, Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP. In the light of the withdrawal of funding for E L Q students, it will be interesting to hear what the minister has to say, and we are going to pose some questions to him as well! Whether or not you are attending Conference this year, you have a chance to put your questions to the minister. Send your questions to the O U S A Office, either by email at [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk) or by post to Open University Students Association, PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE, marking your correspondence 'Ministers Questions'.



Another feature of Annual Conference is 'hustings', your chance to question the candidates for election to O U S A's Executive Committee. There are 10 positions up for election: President, Deputy

## **Conference Reminder**

Branches and Regions have until 28<sup>th</sup> March to send in their list of provisional delegates to Conference, and the yellow individual delegate registration cards must arrive at the office by 4<sup>th</sup> April.

President, Vice Presidents Communications, Constitution, Education, Equal Opportunities, Finance, Representation and Student Support, and O U Student Council Member. Delegates to Conference will grill the candidates live on the Friday evening, but even if you are not going this year, you can still have your chance to ask questions. 'Virtual Hustings', the online equivalent of Friday night live hustings, will take place on FirstClass between the dates of 11<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> April. Go to O U Students Association/ OUSA Live/ OUSA Virtual Hustings. Log in to have your say!

As you will have read in this issue, we have launched the O U S A Futures Project, to find out what the students want from O U S A as we go forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As Conference is primarily concerned with how O U S A works and what it stands for, it is an ideal opportunity to focus our minds to the future of O U S A. To this end, there will be a real 'graffiti wall' for delegates to submit their ideas, and a debate that will help identify the pressing issues and inform the direction of the project. We expect the views to be diverse, and arguments to be robust, so is not to be missed if you will be there!

## **Contact us!**

You can contact O U S A in the following ways:

**Postal Address:** Open University Students Association PO Box 397 Walton Hall Milton Keynes MK7 6BE; **Telephone:** +44 (0) 1908 652026; **Fax:** +44 (0) 1908 654326; **Web:** [Contact O U S A through the web](#)

## **O U S A Web Store**

To buy past exam papers and other O U and O U S A goodies, visit

[O U S A Web Store.](#)

All profits are donated to O U S E T, our charity that helps students in financial difficulty.

## **Did you know?**

If you take a study break, for whatever reason, you can extend your membership of O U S A for up to one year.

Email [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk) for more details.

## O U S E T Prize Draw

You have the chance to enter a prize draw to win one of two great prizes, with all proceeds going to O U S E T, the student charity.

A signed photograph of the surface of Titan, taken from the European Space Agency's Huygens Probe. Signed by Professor John Zarnecki, the principal investigator on the mission.



### To Enter:

Go to the [O U S A Webshop](#) and click 'raffle'

**Cost:** £1 per entry

Enter online until Friday 18th April.

Winners will be announced on the Website by Wednesday 30th April

A Nintendo Wii games console.



### **OUSET The Student Charity**

In 1982, OUSA established the Open University Students Educational Trust (OUSET) to help those students who were in financial need but did not qualify for assistance from elsewhere. O U students who are in financial difficulty can apply to the Trust for assistance, including postgraduate students and students studying outside the U K. However, as the funds available are relatively small, the Trustees use a set of criteria on which to base their decisions. For more details, visit <http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p9.shtml>

### **The O U S A Membership Card...**

...is still available to all members, and is free! For details of how to get yours, go to [http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p2\\_5.shtml#p1](http://www2.open.ac.uk/ousa/p2_5.shtml#p1)

## Support for Students

### **Student Support Links (S S Ls)**

Our Student Support Links are O U students who volunteer their time to help others with problems that are affecting their studies. Student Support covers all areas that support your academic experience. For example, fees and financial awards, concerns about tutors, exams, exam venues, access to computing, tutorial venues and Health & Safety. Every region has a Student Support Link and are just an email message away.

### **Disabled Students Links (D S Ls)**

Our Disabled Students Links are able to help with issues affecting disabled students. For example, concerns about access to tutorial venues, challenges about attending residential school, format of course materials and dealing with a home assessment.

### **How to Contact your Support Links**

Volunteers for both these support roles are elected by regional forums and are regionally-based, so often have a wealth of contacts, both locally and within the wider O U community. They understand from experience what it is like to be an O U student and will not dismiss as trivial something that is causing concern. Any correspondence you have with your support links will be treated as confidential.

To contact your Student Support Link, email: [ousa-ssl@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-ssl@open.ac.uk)

To contact your Disabled Student Link email: [ousa-dsl@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-dsl@open.ac.uk)

In order to obtain a speedy response please quote your region name and we will put you in touch with the correct support link as soon as possible.

## Central Reps. – A Newby's Perspective

When an OUSA colleague asked me had I thought of applying to become a Central Representative my first thought was, "What's a Central Rep"? My second was, "What do they do"? After a brief explanation and some further investigation this is, in a nut shell, what I found out.

A Central Rep is the eyes and ears of the Open University's Students Association. This is achieved by attending Open University meetings, such as faculty meetings highlighting OUSA's policies when necessary and reporting back to OUSA anything of interest and occasionally concern that has been discussed.

With growing interest I applied for the position and happily was accepted, as always with OUSA my disability was not considered a barrier. Prior to my first meeting a residential training weekend was held, which was intensive, thorough and extremely informative. While there I also sought out an experienced and respected Central Rep and spent an hour or so talking to her informally and found this enormously helpful.

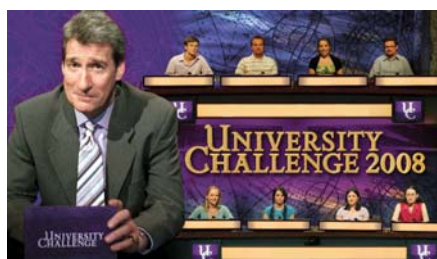
Upon reflection, my first meeting was a bit of a blur, it all seemed so formal but I have recently attended my second Faculty of Health and Social Care meeting and found that I actually enjoyed it. Other attendees remembered me and made me feel very welcome, I was able to chat to a few tutors and found they were genuinely interested in OUSA and the support it offers to students.

I am proud to represent my association at this level, if you are interested in decisions that may affect fellow students and have the time why not consider becoming an OUSA Central Representative.

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## Hands on the Buzzer Please!

**Are you a current student with the O U? Do you have at least 120 points gained from your OU studies? Do you expect to continue with those studies in 2009? Ever thought you'd like to be on TV?**



OUSA will shortly be selecting team members for the next series of University Challenge. If you are interested to take part, you must be studying with the Open University in the year 2008, and because transmission runs into 2009 you should expect to remain a student in that year. You should also have at least 120 points worth of study with the O U.

Prospective candidates would need to be available for interview in early to mid May 2008. If an O U team is then successful in the early stages of the competition, recordings will take place in Manchester in mid June and early July 2008 and again in mid October.

If you'd like to be considered for the O U team and can satisfy the conditions above, as well as make yourself available for the interview and recording dates, then you can take part in OUSA's selection process. Do this by contacting [ousa@student.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.ac.uk) or send your name and address to OUSA (UNIV), PO Box 397, Walton Hall, and Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE. **Time will soon run out so don't delay – do it today!**