

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back.

OK, so now we have a session about the Open University Students Association. So welcome back, Cherry, and welcome, Nikki, to the studio.

Now, Cherry is the Vice President of Equal Opportunities. Nikki, you don't have a badge.

NICOLA Oh, I'm sorry.

SIMPSON:

KAREN FOLEY: Have you not got a badge? But you have a lovely T-shirt, may I say.

NICOLA Thank you.

SIMPSON:

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, I don't have a badge either. And you are the Deputy President of the Students Association.

Now, I wanted to ask you why you're involved in this and how being involved with the Open University Students Association has changed your lives, because I know it's had a massive impact both being students, as well as now taking up these posts, which you've only recently just grasped hold of. So could I ask you, Nikki, first, why are you involved and what's in it for you?

NICOLA Well, I got involved in the Students Association about three or four years ago when I went
SIMPSON: along to my first student conference. And at that time, I was quite isolated at home. I was really struggling with my health. And I wanted to get out and meet other students.

And I went to conference, and it just blew me away. There were so many students there. The Students Association was doing so much for students. And it felt like a really good opportunity for me to get out and meet people and do something to give back to the OU community, which I felt so strongly about at the time.

KAREN FOLEY: You went to conference.

NICOLA Yes.

SIMPSON:

KAREN FOLEY: That's obviously a physical getting together of a lot of people here at the Open University in Walton Hall. How was that?

NICOLA It's just fabulous. There's lots of workshops to do. There's visitors from outside the university.
SIMPSON: We have the chance to go and take a campus tour, go into the observatory, all sorts of things. But just to meet other people who are studying is fabulous and from all around the country.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, I've heard they're absolutely brilliant. Really, really good.

Cherry, what about you? You've been involved for quite some time now in a variety of different areas.

CHERRY DAY: Yeah, eight years. Mainly because I was diagnosed with an incurable degenerative disease. And the OU saved my life because I had to accept that I couldn't travel and work anymore. I was housebound for five years.

I signed up with the OU and got to my first conference in 2014. I was an online delegate in 2012. But it's the family feeling of the OU and the Association, in particular, that through my work with the DSG from May 2008, I got involved with the Association as a local representative on the community of the DSG. And that isolation, which a lot of Freshers feel, is reduced a lot when that family is there on the other side of your screen. And the Association are wonderful at communicating tonnes of stuff as well as helpful stuff. And we are part of a big family, to use the word.

KAREN FOLEY: And you're always out having cups of coffee with people in a variety of places around the country. I know. I know. But you are meeting up with students a lot. And you're having a real impact in terms of welcoming people to the Open University community, and just connecting and supporting each other, which I guess is what it's all about.

But the Students Association, they do a lot of things and there are a lot of benefits. And the Freshers Week is on at the moment. People can go and take a look at the website and see the range of activities. You've got a lot of live chats going on and various activities, including these.

There are lots of benefits as well, because everybody who is an Open University student is part of the Students Association, aren't they?

NICOLA That's right, yeah.

SIMPSON:

KAREN FOLEY: So what do they get?

NICOLA So every student, once they become enrolled, are a member of the Students Association. And
SIMPSON: for students, they have the opportunity to meet people in their areas, the type of meetings that we were just talking about Cherry going out with her mug and talking to people.

But they also have the opportunity to shape the university and how it actually engages with students. Students can come to us and tell us their problems. And we can take that back to the university to try and actually influence for change. So it makes the whole experience of being a student better for everybody through the Students Association.

KAREN FOLEY: So aside from those things, I mean, we had the session, which you joined us in yesterday, about the student consultation process. And we have other sessions as well about how the student voice is incorporated within the university.

But I think what most people are interested in is the NUS card, getting free stuff. And we were talking a lot about this yesterday. So how do people get this?

NICOLA So to get your NUS card, if you, basically, go on to the openuniversity.ac.uk/ousa, that takes
SIMPSON: you to our website. And there's a link on there which tells you how you can get your NUS Extra card.

It does give you discounts in lots of places. It feels great to be able to show it in all the shops that we go into and to have sometimes a flash of shock on the shop assistant's face as looks at you and says, you're not a student, are you? Quite often they engage in conversation about the OU.

KAREN FOLEY: There's loads of shops, Topshop. Everyone does discounts for students, don't they? So not only can you get sensible things, like books, but also shoes, which I think is very important.

CHERRY DAY: Oh, yes.

KAREN FOLEY: OK, great.

Now, we asked you to bring some things that you think the students need. So can you show us

some of the visuals that you think are important for students, and how they relate to the Students Association?

NICOLA
SIMPSON: OK. Well, we've brought the Students Association mug because we think tea and coffee is a really important thing in the life of a student. First of all, in the student meetups in your local region, quite often they're coffee meetups. But just to get you through your studies on a day-to-day basis, we really thrive on tea and coffee.

KAREN FOLEY: Now, this is a branded mug, is it?

NICOLA
SIMPSON: It is, yeah. So we held a competition. And this mug was actually designed by a student. We went through several different proposals for the mug, and this was the winner. So it's a lovely depiction of somebody studying outside.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Because, of course, there is merchandise as well for people, like these T-shirts and mugs, et cetera, that people can get. And can they get that from the Open University Students Association website -

NICOLA
SIMPSON: That's right.

KAREN FOLEY: - shop?

NICOLA
SIMPSON: There's a web shop on our website. And all the profits from that shop actually go to supporting students in financial need through the OUSET Trust.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. Excellent.

What else do students most need then, do you think?

NICOLA
SIMPSON: What do they most need? So we had our conversation yesterday about stationery. We were all talking about stationery online. Students love going to modern stationery shops, don't they? So they go out and buy things for their course, and then post about it on Twitter, on Facebook. And we have lots of engagement that way from students.

So it's a practical thing that you need, but it also means if you go and tweet a picture of what you have, it's a way to engage with other students. And that's really, really essential in your journey as a student.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, I'd say after tea and coffee and cake, stationery is probably a very high topic of concern in our chat rooms here as well. So, yeah.

And also having an organised desk. It's that whole sense of being organised and being actively in control of your study, isn't it, really? I think is what stationery symbolises.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** Yeah. Well, you do have to take ownership of it. It is hard being an OU student, and you have to take responsibility for all the things that get you to the finish line, don't you? You are the learner. You have to own that, and open your books every day or whenever you choose to do it.

KAREN FOLEY: Do your highlighting and colouring in.

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** Yeah, exactly.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent.

What is this cuddly toy all about?

CHERRY DAY: Well, Nikki's touched on it. The Association attends the graduation ceremonies. And we have a stand, a big stall there with all the Association branded stuff and the OU branded stuff there to sell. And all the graduates are there with their families and supporters. And I'm modelling one of the varsity jackets, which is also on the stand. And the money we raise at that stand at the graduation ceremonies goes to the OU Student Educational Trust, which is OUSET. Yes?

**NICOLA
SIMPSON:** Yes.

CHERRY DAY: OUSET. So we are helping and contributing to helping those students, who for whatever reason can't afford fees. They might be made redundant. They might be on a minimum wage somewhere and they want to further their career, they can apply to the trust and get funding to help them. So that is what all these little bits are about.

KAREN FOLEY: I thought the owl was about nightline.

CHERRY DAY: The owl is also -

KAREN FOLEY: And about studying really late at night.

CHERRY DAY: We've all been there, three o'clock in the morning. William, my owl, sits on my desk in front of me along with other bits and pieces. And he is my reminder of the nighttime stuff, when I have to turn off everything just to get me head down and study.

But the help and support is there from the Association, from their main website. There's help and support, there's events, everything there. So you don't have to feel alone at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. And all the Facebook groups as well.

NICOLA SIMPSON: And that's the beauty of distance learning, actually. There's always a student online somewhere, so it's finding a way to reach out and connect with them so that you can feel like you're not alone. Tackle some of that isolation.

CHERRY DAY: And we're all students. We've all been there. We're all doing it. So we're all helping one another all the time. And that's what the Association is all about, isn't it?

NICOLA SIMPSON: Absolutely.

CHERRY DAY: Yeah.

KAREN FOLEY: So how do students then connect and reach out to people? What are the formats? What are the options? I know there are cafes, virtual cafes as well as real cafes. How can students go and connect with other people, other than obviously the places like this?

NICOLA SIMPSON: Really, there's a lot of options online. So social media is the obvious one. Many of us use social media now, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all those spaces. And the Students Association does have a presence there.

There's also the online forums, which you can find on Student Home. There's a link just to the left of your Student homepage, which takes you to the Students Association forums. There's a Freshers Forum in there. There's a whole host of forums on different subject matters, faculty-based ones, interest-based ones. So there are two ways to get involved, but also the face-to-face meetups which happen around the country.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. Nikki and Cherry, thank you so much for coming and filling us in that's all we've got time for today.

As usual, we leave people wanting more. But take a look at the Open University Students

Association website. Check out the range of activities that are on there. Connect with others. Get your discount card. And see how you can reach out to the Open University community.

I must say, actually, your Twitter feed is very good as well. I like @OUstudents. So that's always worth a plug also.

OK. It's time for tea. Go and get yourself a nice, fresh cuppa, please. We're going to have a little video break. We're going to talk about writing in your own words in that video, and also employability. We're back then for some live science, which I'm really looking forward to. So we'll see you in five.

[MUSIC PLAYING]