



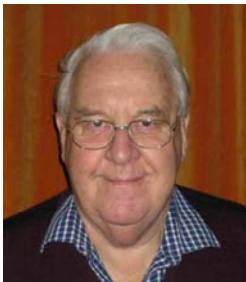
OU Students  
Association

# OUSA in the East of England February 2011

If you need this newsletter in another format please  
contact [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk)

Welcome to an OUSA in the East of England newsletter and a belated Happy New Year to you. If you are new to the O U – welcome to your Student Association, there's loads of information about the organisation itself that you can access online at [www.ousa.org.uk](http://www.ousa.org.uk) and a brief list of who we are in the East of England is online at [ousa-east.org.uk](http://ousa-east.org.uk).

So – who am I anyway? I am your current student representative from the East of



England Region on the OUSA Central Executive Committee – known as E C M East of England; basically I act as a messenger and dogsbody who carries information between the students in the region and the elected powers that be at the centre. I am elected too, so you'll have the opportunity to replace me if you register to vote.

I have been an O U student since 2002 – studying Earth Sciences initially, I have now moved (probably temporarily) onto the fluffier side in order to study a Welsh course (and with plans to continue to study for several years yet - if the cost doesn't escalate beyond all reason) – it all gets a bit addictive. My wife gained an O U degree when the O U was in its infancy, back in the 1970s.

You can contact me via my E C M mailbox - directly via my FirstClass address, OUSA ECM East of England, [oufent1.open.ac.uk](mailto:oufent1.open.ac.uk) or via “normal” email to [ousao26@guest.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousao26@guest.open.ac.uk) – if you have a **skype address** I will even call you back (using **my** skype phone only - please no mobile telephone numbers!).

I'm afraid that I “don't **do** Facebook” – I have a private box there but I don't look in very often and it is not, at present, an official OUSA communication route.

## Next Question – What is OUSA?

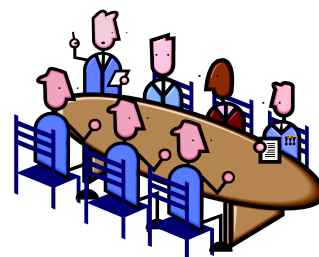
You automatically become a member of OUSA (the Open University Students Association) simply by registering for and studying any module (formerly known as a course) with the Open University. The organisation is run by elected (and unpaid) student volunteers and a small number of full-time paid staff (who also study O U courses from time to time). The staff work at OUSA's own (independent) office on the O U campus at Walton Hall. The organisation exists because the original University Charter stated that there must be an "Association of Students" – the University pays for it out of your fees (as at all face to face Universities) but the Association operates independently and is answerable to students themselves. If you don't feel the need for an Association, you can opt out – but you won't get a reduction in your fees to the O U – and, in an era of increasing financial pressure on Universities generally, you may well feel that you need someone to represent you and attempt to protect your interests as a student!

## O K Why are you writing to us now?

Much has happened since I last put together a Regional Newsletter (in September last). We have become the first Regional Assembly in England, under a new deal known as "OUSA Futures" (admittedly Scotland and Wales got in first) but at least five other regions in England are currently following suit and by Easter, more than 50% of the regions (and students) will be operating under this new system.

Becoming a Regional Assembly means that it is no longer necessary for interested students to keep their heads down in order to avoid being cajoled into being a Chair, Secretary or whatever else you **don't** want to be. Informal groups can now meet up without a need for agendas, minutes and all that palaver. Just meet, have a natter (or moan), probably over something liquid, at the venue of your choice. A group doesn't have to be tied to a specific geographic focus, it can be interest group based or what-have-you – even peripatetic if you want to do it that way.

Studying for a degree (or even simply studying a course for general interest) can be a lonely activity so that sharing experiences with similar students and pooling information usually helps to "oil the machinery".



The gathering of information about the issues that **you** want us to take up with the University still goes on – but at regional level – it's all done very

openly, online as well as at face to face meetings at Cambridge and I publish on the Assembly's FirstClass forum, after each meeting of the Central Executive Committee, an informal report about what is happening in the organisation centrally. We don't have "secret meetings in smoke filled rooms" and take the view that the opinions and views of someone in their first year is every bit as valid as the opinions and views of "old hands".

Any currently registered O U student who would like to play a part in the Assembly is welcome to join in – there is space for over 40 members on the East of England Assembly, we have just over 20 – all members of the Assembly volunteer to play a part themselves and are elected (by all registered O U students in the region who choose to register to vote), they come from all stages in their O U career, all types of work and domestic backgrounds and from all parts of the region.

## How do I find out more?

Well, first of all, have you found the OUSA website at <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/> which contains most information and lots of documents to bewilder you. There is also <http://www.ousanearyou.org.uk/index.htm> which leads to links to each region of the organisation, including the East of England. We are even developing our own Regional



website at <http://www.ousa-east.org.uk> but this is very much under construction (you can also reach the East of England website via a link from <http://www.ousanearyou.org.uk/index.htm>)

Unfortunately, communication between students and the organisation is not easy. You will not usually receive posts via "snail mail" unless you have registered with the O U that you do not have any I T option. Consequently, most of what we do comes via the internet to the email address that you have registered with the O U as your preferred e-mail address. At the moment, we also rely on an online bulletin board system run on software called FirstClass, which is also used by many other organisations (academic and non-academic). Many people have found that the system is "clunky" and have not been keen to use it. However, the University has, over the past couple of years moved over to a forum system accessed online from your student desktop. The software for FirstClass itself is no longer provided for new students. Unfortunately, however, the replacement student desktop system has not yet been adapted so that it can be used by OUSA for student contact. We have promises, in typical "I T speak", of "real soon now" – probably later this year – May has been mentioned, but I am becoming a bit jaundiced by the promises!

At present, the forums available via FirstClass can be accessed from your student desktop. Full details on how to do it are at <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/forums.php>

However, briefly, in order to get into the forums, log onto the O U site and on your “student home” page, look at the left hand column (before you click on the course page) - below the caption that begins “Welcome Mr/Mrs/Ms Your name” (with “Profile” on the next line). Lower in that column is a block headed “Links” and the first item under “Links” is likely to be “Your OU mailbox and discussion forums Server X” (where X is a 1 or 2). Click on that and a new page will load with a series of other links listed, including “Mailbox” “Open University” “Address Book” and several others, including “OU Students Association”.

If you click on “OU Student Association”, you will find links named “OUSA Signpost”, “OUSA Live” etc. Clicking on “OUSA Signpost” will open a page with a bewildering list of forums, most of which have red flags attached to them (indicating that there are messages contained in them that you have not yet read – warning – do not try to read them all, there are far too many!). Instead click on “OUSA Live” – one of the options on the new page that opens is “OUSA Regions” and if you click on that another set of choices opens, with a list of very old messages, but also with options in the top half of the page, including “OUSA East of England”, hopefully in the middle of the top line. If you click on that, the next page that opens gives a list of “branches” in alphabetical order in the top half, together with “OUSA E of E Assembly”. In the lower part of the page, there are reasonably recent postings from other students. Don’t be afraid to introduce yourself – you are most welcome.

## So, how do I meet up with other students?

Well, for a start, there are the students on your own course (sorry – module) who you may meet at tutorials or online on your course forum. However, there are over 25000 registered O U students in the East of England and there is a very high probability that there are some in your own village (if you live in a village) – certainly there will be several in most towns - for example I am told that there are about 1000 in the Kings Lynn district (where I live myself).

Because of data protection rules, neither OUSA nor the O U can supply lists of who they are – to anyone. However, you can post a message on the forum that seems to be closest to your home, enquiring whether there is anyone else who wants to meet up informally to swap moans or information about your own experiences of O U study or simply to have virtual “meetings”, online. No formalities, no agendas, minutes or commitments – it’s all up to you and we won’t ask you to be a chair – that’s a promise.



## What else can I get out of it?

Well, you can find out more about your own University and how it works (and sometimes why it doesn't seem to work quite as you expect or would like). OUSA needs representatives (from all areas and from all stages on their student journey) to join in on the O U's own Regional Committee, made up of O U staff, Associate Lecturers (tutors) and students in roughly equal numbers. This discusses changes, planned and unplanned, affecting the O U and students are welcome to express their views on how these changes impact on students such as themselves. To find out whether there is a student delegate for your area, please contact me direct. There is just as great a need for students who are new to O U study as there is for "addicts" who have been "at it" for years.

You can also network with other students at the OUSA Conference, held this year at the O U's own campus in Milton Keynes. Yes – it does have a campus, just like other Universities. The Conference takes place from 5 p m (ish) on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> April until 1 p m on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April. OUSA will provide accommodation (at a nearby conference unit) and meals for up to about 45 students from the East of England – and even reimburse public transport travel or the cost of fuel to get there by car. If you have special needs, it will even bend over backwards to try to facilitate these for you and if required, help with accommodation for a carer. Application forms can be found on the OUSA website <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/conference.php>, but please let me know if you wish to go, by contacting me direct, so that the Secretary of the Assembly and I include you in the regional list that we have to send in - and also keep you informed of what is going on. Fairly full information on Conference 2011 and all forthcoming elections that you can take part in is set out on the OUSA website. If you are not certain whether the date suits, you can still apply now and withdraw later if you need to – what you can't do is to decide, closer to the date of Conference, that you would have wanted to go after all. The final date for letting me know that you wish to go will be 15<sup>th</sup> March as we have to send in the regional list on the following day!



Other goodies, discount cards, N U S cards, past examination papers, souvenirs and the like are all detailed via the main website: <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/>. So do take a look.

## And The Future?

Hopefully, after Conference in April 2011, we will be able to continue with the new Assembly, although this will in part depend upon decisions taken at OUSA Conference, some of which relate to a new Constitution (needed to comply with Charities Commission requirements). If you really want to read the draft of the new Constitution in advance (and I can quite understand why you might **not** want to), please let me know, with your email address, and I will even send you an electronic copy of the latest draft or I can let you know where it can be downloaded from.

One thing that you can be certain of is that in the next year or two there will be changes to University Education, and the costs to students. These will affect **all** of us, but OUSA is committed to negotiating with the O U to achieve the “best deal” for O U students that it can. For us to do so effectively, we do need to have **your** opinions!

## Contacting OUSA in the East of England



Tell us what **you** think via the OUSA East of England forum on FirstClass – or direct to my FirstClass or email address (as given on the first page of this newsletter). I can promise an acknowledgement, and at best an explanation of the whys and wherefores, or an undertaking to pass the problem further up the line.

For further information on the activities of OUSA in the East of England, contact your



Executive Committee Member directly via my FirstClass address, OUSA ECM East of England, oufcnt1.open.ac.uk or via “normal” email to

[ousao26@guest.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousao26@guest.open.ac.uk) – if you have a **skype**

address I will even call you back (using **my** skype phone only - please no mobile telephone numbers!).

Alternatively contact the OUSA Office on 01908 652026 [ousa@student.open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa@student.open.ac.uk)

The “snail mail” address is: PO Box 397, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6BE.