

OUSA Conference Report
from the 13th – 15th April
at the University of Warwick in Coventry.

This was my first ever visit to the OUSA Conference – also generally to such a big event. First of all, when I arrived at the building we needed to go to register, I was overwhelmed: I think there were about 350 students attending this conference. I was also really surprised about the whole organisation, which was planned really well, everyone was friendly and even though I was a bit nervous, I felt really welcome.

On Friday we had a meeting with the rest of the Northern Europe Regional Forum, and I think a few of the Southern attended too, where some of the motions presented below were discussed before the conference began.

On that evening, the candidates for President and some of the other important roles presented themselves.

The next day, conference started at 9 a.m. In the evening of the 14th, there was special this year with a celebration dinner in honour of the 25th birthday of OUSET (the student charity) and the 30th anniversary of inclusive OUSA membership, which was really nice, as OUSET again collected a lot of money for students in need.

I have to say thank you to make it possible for me to attend to such a fantastic experience and I can only recommend this to any student who really wants to make changes and learn new things about the Open University and its community.

Below I have reported about the motions moved by the Northern Europe Regional Forum. If carried, OUSA will present those to the Open University, they will then decide whether to adopt these, depending on their possibilities.

Thanks,

Eva Issa
(Delegate, Frankfurt Branch)

Decisions of NERF motions at the OUSA Conference 2007:

16 M(PO)

(referred to EC)

This association notes:

- That currently it is not made absolutely clear to any user of OUSA online forums which rules apply, how complaints are being dealt with, how to follow the right procedures, what the possibilities of appeal against moderating decisions are and what follow after any breach of the rules

The association resolves that:

- As a matter of urgency there be a thorough revision of the OUSA rules and the OUSA Complaints Procedures with respect of the OUSA suite of online forums and that the agreed Rules & Procedures be published in a clear and unambiguous form in prominent places within the OUSA online area accessible to all OUSA online forum users.
- Any complain which doesn't follow the right sequence of appeal will be dismissed
- Rules to deal with serial complainers be developed
- In case of any mistake made by OUSA regarding moderating and complaints decisions any consequential message of correction will only appear in an official read-only OUSA conference and will be posted by OUSA Controller after consultation with the relevant OUSA Officials
- OUSA commits to enter into negotiations with the OU with the objective of reaching an agreement that the OU will not intervene in such complaints when the right

sequence of appeal has not been followed and that on the case the right sequence has been followed the OU will investigate all sides of the matter.

17M (PO)

(Part A carried, Part B referred to EC)

This Association resolves to put into immediate effect the following Code on Communication with Student Moderators responsible for moderating OUSA forums on FirstClass (and its successors):

1. All correspondence from a contributor to student moderators about matters related to moderation on a Forum shall be considered as mail to OUSA generically and therefore may be copied to other members of a moderating team and OUSA Controller without formality.
2. Contributors must not use threatening, obscene or other offensive language or material when corresponding with student moderators either in private mail or on Forums.
3. Contributors who breach this Code may be regarded by student moderators as in breach of OUSA and OU measures against bullying and harassment and reported with due evidence to the relevant authorities.

18M (PO)

(referred to EC)

This Association calls upon the Executive Committee to set up with immediate effect a team of volunteer Regional Moderation Support Linds (RMSLs), charged with supervising FirstClass (and its successors) and providing support to moderators outside of office hours.

The RMSLs shall work on a rota basis outside Office hours and be authorised to act temporarily with full Controller permissions on behalf of OUSA Controller, including making contentious Forums read-only, until the return of OUSA Controller to assess the situation.

Steering committee note: This motion had been disallowed. It has been reinstated as the originating unit submitted an amendment which remedied the problem.

19M (PO)

(referred to EC)

This Association resolves to ensure that when a student moderator of an OUSA forum on FirstClass (or its successors) is the subject of a complaint to OUSA Controller or OUSA Complaints, that the moderator is automatically informed that a complaint has been made, and of the general content but not the origin of such complaint. The student moderator shall also have the right to put their side of the case before a decision is reached, and shall have the right to appeal to the full Executive Committee against OUSA Controller's decision within 21 days of a decision being published.

20M (PO)

(carried)

This Association resolves to ensure that when a contributor to or student moderator of an OUSA on-line forum is informed of a decision that affects him or her, both substantiated reasons for the decision and information on how the decision may be appealed against are provided.

21M (PO)

(carried)

This Association resolves to ensure that OUSA Controller's Advisory Panel provides its advice and that OUSA Controller communicates any subsequent decisions to parties affected within 21 days of a matter being referred to the Panel.

Steering Committee Note: This motion incorporates an amendment from the originating unit.

22M (PO)

(carried)

This Association resolves to ensure that the names of and Office held by the members of OUSA Controller's Advisory Panel are published as part of any decision OUSA Controller publishes concerning matters referred to the Panel.

44M (PO)

(withdrawn)

This Association recognises that overseas students have specific problems and challenges in studying with the O U and calls on the Executive Committee to prepare a detailed review of the way the interests of overseas students are handled by OUSA in full consultation with the students and Branches concerned.

68M (PO)

(carried)

This conference notes that the 5MB limit on students' mailboxes is no longer sufficient to receive the ever-increasing volume and size of electronic communications from the University, and has already led to situations where vital messages have been undelivered during a period of holiday or sickness.

This Association urges the University to increase the limit to a more realistic limit of at least 50MB.

99M (PO)

(carried)

This Association notes with dismay the decisions by the Open University to discontinue the issue to students of free anti-virus and firewall software, despite the representations made by the University's own anti-virus team.

This Conference considers that with the requirements for more and more students to have access to a computer and the internet and with the exchange of more and more information via virtual means, proper and effective anti-virus and firewall software is essential for all students, and the Association urges the University to reinstate the free anti-virus and firewall software.

111M (PO)

(referred to EC)

This Association calls upon the Open University to ensure that all students registered with the University and resident overseas outside the University's Agreed Study Areas shall be entitled to be attached to Region 9 for the purposes of administration, study and learning support, and OUSA membership.

127M (PO)

(defeated)

This Association deplores the proposal of the British Government to instruct teachers and university lecturers to report the political leanings of their students to Special Branch and MI5. This Association reminds the University that it is an academic environment where the search for truth and the value of free academic debate and discussion should be unfettered by the threat of involvement of the state and urges the University, staff lecturers and students to defend absolutely the right of free speech in an academic environment and context.

128M (PO)

(defeated)

This Association:

- a) Reaffirms its belief that Universities are places where the search for truth and academic debate should be unfettered and where students must therefore have a right to express freely their thought and opinions;
- b) Instruct the Executive Committee to discuss with the University the impact current and future Government security measures on the above principles.