

# Comprehensive Guide to the OU Students Association Forum Service

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**Open University Students’ Association Forums**

## “AT A GLANCE”

This is a brief guide summarising the OU Students' Association forum service. More detailed information if you require it can be found in the Comprehensive Guide to the Association's Forum service.

1. Student Association community forums are open to all those with access to the University's online learning systems regardless of their membership status with the Association. This includes present and past students as well as University central staff and Associate Lecturers (tutors).
2. There are also closed forums for Association business which can only be accessed by specified groups of students such as 'Talk to your Students Association' Forum, Elections Forums and By-elections Forums.
3. These forums are moderated by student volunteers and ultimately controlled by the Association's student representatives with support from the permanent office staff.
4. The Association's forums are not part of the OU's official academic provision. But many students who use them find that support from their fellow students makes their OU experience more fulfilling
5. Except for the President and Deputy President all students involved in providing the service are unpaid volunteers.
6. All users of our forums are required to abide by the University's Student Computing Code of Conduct and online communications systems guidelines which can be found at <http://www.open.ac.uk/computingguide/codes/guidelines.html>.
7. Unless otherwise stated all references to 'the rules' are references to the details found within these University documents.
8. All our forums must abide to our Code of Conduct and those contributing to any forum are expected to do so in line with this. Failure to do so may result in posts being removed and persistent failure to observe the Code of Conduct may be referred for further action, or removal of permissions in case of posts being made in the closed forum by users who don't represent that specified group of students.
9. Any complaints will be handled through our Resolving and Settling Differences Procedure.

Our commitment to those who use our service:

We aim to:

- offer an open space to the service users to enhance their study journey.
- treat all users of our service fairly and give clear information about their rights to challenge our decisions.
- be impartial in dealing with complaints or considering disciplinary action and where possible in the first instance to resolve them informally.
- follow the procedure for dealing with complaints – As laid out in the Resolving and Settling Differences Procedure.

We will not tolerate users of our services who: -

- refuse to operate within the rules.
- refuse to follow Code of Conduct.
- abuse other contributors.
- abuse moderators, staff or elected representatives for carrying out their responsibilities within our procedures.
- whose behaviour potentially disrupts the service.

... and finally

If you wish to challenge any aspect as to how a forum is managed, please contact the forum moderators in the first instance or refer the matter to the OUSA Controller.

## **OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION PUBLIC FORUMS A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO THE SERVICE**

## SECTION A - THE BASIS OF OUR SERVICE

### 1. Rules and Guidelines for Association Forums

- a. The Students Association runs a range of forums within the OU's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).  
These include study-related forums, general interest and discussion forums, and forums for those wanting to engage with their study and fellow students. They provide for study support and a social area for students to meet and help build a viable student community.
- b. To continue to run these forums, we need to show the University we can run them efficiently without having any negative effect on the University or using too many of their resources.
- c. The Association is responsible to the University for ensuring these responsibilities are fulfilled. The President is responsible to Association members for safeguarding the provision of this service.
- d. The Students Association forums are run independently by students, for students. Everyone who has access to the OU's online learning environment (eligible staff, current students and recently graduated students) are welcome to use our forums, but all the moderators are or have been students.
- e. The Association requires all forum users to participate in line with the rules and guidelines laid down for each forum. In particular, all users need to respect and cooperate with our Moderators, the Association Staff acting as OUSA Controller.
- f. Participants in the Association's online public forums should be aware that they are open to students under the age of 18, who are able to access them with parental guidance / approval. This should be borne in mind when reading and replying to posts.
- g. Participants should be aware that under the Security Act 2015, the Open University has a statutory duty to pay 'due regard' to the possibility that vulnerable students could be drawn into terrorism. The Student Association Forums on the University's VLE fall under this jurisdiction and therefore it is incumbent on the Students Association to report for further investigation, any pertinent activities that might include 'hate ideas' or discussions around 'violent intent'.

Posts of this nature are likely to breach our general guidelines and it is sufficient for a moderator to deal with them on these grounds. Further action if needed will be taken by the office staff. Both student moderators and Association staff have undergone the relevant training.

## **2. Management of the Service**

- a. A combination of OUSA Controller and appointed moderators take the main responsibility for running our forums. Our appointed student moderators (mods) have the primary responsibility for the day-to-day management of our forums. Moderators will be able to contact each other via the Private Moderator SLACK channel.
- b. Moderators are supported by a team from the Association office in the form of the OUSA Controller.
- c. Beyond OUSA Controller any matter that needs to be determined about the provision of this service and which has not been covered in this guide will be determined by Student Association staff and representatives via our 'Resolving and Settling Differences Procedure'. OUSA Controller's mailbox [ousa-controller@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-controller@open.ac.uk).

## **3. The Principles of the Forum Service**

We aim to:

- treat all users of our service fairly and give clear information about your rights to challenge our decisions.
- be impartial in dealing with complaints or considering disciplinary action.
- follow the procedures for dealing with complaints.

We will not tolerate users of our services who:

- refuse to operate within the rules.
- abuse moderators, staff or elected representatives for carrying out their responsibilities.
- are either intentionally or otherwise disrupting the service.

In the day to day management of the forums, our aim is to provide a balance between the rights of the individual and the service to the majority.

From experience we know there are the odd occasions when significant Students Association resources are spent managing a

local dispute or disagreement. Although we want to encourage good quality discussion and debate, we don't want to censor or step in unnecessarily. We do have an obligation to ensure that the rules are adhered to and we take this responsibility very seriously.

We also witness the occasional differences of opinions where individuals struggle to compromise and accept each other's viewpoints. We will deal with these instances with common sense and fairness.

We have a duty of care towards a wider student body and will work hard to understand where the problems lie by reviewing the evidence and circumstances – but in no way can we act as a court of law and any decisions will be made on the balance of probabilities.

Since our forums are managed by volunteer students, with some office hours support from paid staff, inevitably we cannot guarantee 24-hour coverage, and there has been the odd instance where advantage has been taken of this to cause a problem for moderators within a forum.

As you might imagine, any behaviour in this respect would be treated as a serious breach of the rules.

We ask that users of the service understand and accept these principles.

## **SECTION B - FORUM MODERATION**

### **1. Introduction**

Without student moderators (mods) the Association could not provide the suite of social forums currently in existence. The

Association appreciates this and thanks those volunteers who give their time to support this service for other students.

Moderators are responsible for ensuring that our forums comply with the University's online communication systems guidelines.

## **2. The role of Moderators**

Moderators are unpaid volunteers who give their time freely. They work within a moderating team to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the Association forums in accordance with the rules.

## **3. The duties of Moderators**

- a. To work as part of a team of moderators to ensure a forum runs smoothly. This will require communication within the moderator team using a dedicated slack channel for moderators.
- b. To ensure a forum operates in accordance with the rules.
- c. To ensure that any message which contravenes the rules is deleted and that the sender of the message is notified of this moderator action at the same time. This may include a general message on the forum.
- d. To ensure messages sent to them via 'Contact Your Moderator' are answered in good time.
- e. To provide the OUSA Controller with any necessary information for complaints to be dealt with in accordance with the guidelines.
- f. To assist contributors in understanding the rules pertaining to the service in general, and the individual forum.
- g. To ensure that the moderated content is not discussed outside of the forum structure or other approved communication channels.

## **4. The requirements for becoming a Moderator**

- a. A moderator must be a current member of the Association at the time of their application.
- b. A moderator must not have anything more than an informal warning currently on record with the Association regarding forum use.
- c. A moderator must be prepared to undertake the training for the role, and the mandatory training required. This includes but is not limited to GDPR, Safeguarding, PREVENT and any other relevant Association training.

- d. Moderator applications from students who are also Associate Lecturers (ALs) will be accepted if they perform the role as a student.
- e. A moderator must be able to work within a team.
- f. A moderator must agree to uphold the rules.
- g. A moderator must be able to understand that different forums require a different approach to moderating and agree to work with the moderator team to find the approach that suits their specific forum the best (so long as it is in accordance with the rules).
- h. A moderator must be able to communicate effectively, be aware of the etiquette of electronic communication, and understand the differences between being viewed as a contributor and being viewed as a moderator of a forum. If posting as a moderator, they must make this clear.
- i. A moderator must be prepared to review messages in an unbiased manner and treat all contributors with respect.

## **5. The requirement for forums in terms of Moderators**

- a. All forums require a team of moderators to function effectively. The ideal is a minimum of two and a maximum of four. Quiet forums may operate with fewer moderators than this, but it will be taken on a case-by-case basis and reviewed periodically by the OUSA Controller.
- b. If the OUSA Controller deems that a forum is not adequately covered by moderators, vacancies will be publicised as per section 6a below. If the forum cannot function effectively until new moderators are appointed, the forum will be temporarily made read-only until new appointments are made and a message will be placed in the forum to advise of this action.

## **6. The application process for becoming a Moderator**

- a. Applications to become a moderator are welcomed at any time. Details on how to apply can be found on [www.oustudents.com/search-roles](http://www.oustudents.com/search-roles).
- b. Where a new forum is being requested, an advertisement for moderators will be placed in the Moderators SLACK channel.
- c. Should the Forum be approved, any vacancies not filled by this process will be re-advertised in the Moderators SLACK channel. Where an existing forum needs or wants new moderators, an advertisement will be placed in the forum concerned, the Moderators SLACK channel and the Association's website.



- d. Potential applicants must read these guidelines and the rules. If they agree with the documents, applications must be sent via an application webform on [www.oustudents.com](http://www.oustudents.com). Checks will be made in accordance with 6f section (below) and, if the application has been accepted, the applicant will be granted the relevant moderator permission if they applied for a specific forum or sent a list of forums in need of additional moderators. The applicant then follows the standard procedure in 6g section (below). If the application is refused, the applicant will be notified, and reasons will be given.
- e. Within the application a potential applicant will be asked to acknowledge reading and agreeing to these guidelines and asked whether they have a preference to moderate a particular forum. Potential applicants must also include in their application a brief reason for applying for the role (no more than 300 words).
- f. The current moderator team of the forum concerned will be notified of an application to join the team in order to give the opportunity for any reasoned objections to be raised. All applications, and any reasoned objections, will be forwarded to OUSA Controller for consideration. In general, approval will be given when the applicant meets the requirements noted in section 4, but we reserves the right to decline any application.
- g. Applicants who are successful will be expected to complete the mandatory training and be given a six-month trial period of moderating. This will be waived if the applicant is already a moderator or already undertaking a trial period. At the end of the trial period, co-moderators will be invited to comment on the performance of the applicant as a moderator. OUSA Controller will then review the applicant's moderating conduct over the trial, considering these comments where necessary, and, if deemed in accordance with these guidelines, will approve the applicant as a moderator.
- h. If OUSA Controller decides at the end of this trial period that the applicant has not fulfilled the requirements for the role of moderator, they will advise the applicant and remove moderator permissions. OUSA Controller has the discretion to offer an applicant a further six-month trial period, but they are under no obligation to do so, and any decision at the end of a trial period is final.
- i. Moderating an Association forum is a responsibility accompanied by specific permissions. If at any time it is proved that a moderator

is misusing those permissions or failing in their responsibilities, moderator permissions can be withdrawn. If there is any doubt over a moderator's conduct, we reserve the right to suspend moderator permissions pending investigation. It should be noted that this will only occur in cases where evidence is provided that is considered of a serious enough nature to warrant suspension of permissions. In the case of all other complaints, moderators will continue to moderate as normal whilst an investigation is undertaken, and further support provided

- j. In considering the possible removal of moderator status, we will follow the process laid down in the Association's Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures

## **8. Initial support and information for Moderators**

- a. On successful application, all new moderators will be sent a message by our Volunteer and Rep Team and asked to confirm that they have read and understood the information in the Guidelines and that they agree to operate within the terms stated. They will also be required to return a signed copy of the Moderator's agreement. This confirmation and Moderator's agreement will be kept by Association for the duration of their time as a moderator.
- b. Moderators for any single forum will be given access to a private Moderators SLACK Channel.

## **9. A Code of Conduct for Moderators**

- a. Moderators must be aware of the rules, and where they may be found and must abide by the rules both when acting as a moderator and as a contributor on all forums.
- b. Moderators must treat all contributors fairly and be consistent in their approach to the forum and individual contributors.
- c. All moderators of a forum are not expected to read every contribution to that forum, but all messages must be read by at least one moderator within the team (e.g. if a moderator goes on holiday they are not expected to read all messages sent in their absence).
- d. Moderators must respond to a complaint within three working days, but they do not need to wait for someone to complain before they delete a message which clearly breaches the rules. Such messages must be unapproved immediately they are seen by a moderator. Unless complaints are regarding a co-moderator, all

complaints should be copied to all members of the moderator team, so a consensus decision can be reached. Forwarding a message is acceptable to ensure all moderators are aware of a complaint.

- e. Moderators should always adopt a professional stance when acting in the capacity as moderator of a forum (e.g. being polite and non-judgemental). They should also be aware that their actions as a contributor to a forum that they moderate can influence the tone of the forum and the behaviour of others.
- f. Moderators should recognise that the forum belongs to the Association and the contributors. Moderators should only intervene in response to a complaint or a breach of the requirements. They have no more say than any other users of the forum and have no authority to, for example, decide which topics can be discussed or prescribe the way the forum is viewed. They may, however, split or merge threads for the sake of clarity and can lock threads when discussion has been exhausted or the thread has moved to topics outside the Code of Conduct.
- g. Moderators must not provide official support or advice on any matter, other than guidance about the requirements for using the forum. This is particularly important where forums are deemed to be “supportive” in nature, for example health related forums.
- h. When deleting posts, moderators must inform the sender that the message has been deleted as part of the process. If multiple posts within a thread have been deleted, then a single message on the forum to that effect will be enough notification. Moderators should only delete messages which are not in accordance with the Code of Conduct. Moderators should not delete other posts except at the request of the sender.
- i. If a post has been deleted the moderating team should discuss it and decide to either restore it, suggest it be modified by the original poster or keep it deleted.
- j. Moderators need to ensure they are not over-zealous and should use their judgment on whether aspects such as off-topic conversation should be allowed. It will not be the same for all forums, but it should be recognised that off-topic conversation can allow a forum to run more smoothly at times and a heavy-handed approach can cause more disruption than a handful of off-topic messages.

- k. Moderators are permitted to post in forums that they moderate as contributors to any discussion (please see 9I below). If posting as a moderator, they should make that clear.
- l. Moderators should be aware that at times it may be necessary to withdraw temporarily from contributing to a forum that they moderate, for example to ensure impartiality when a strong debate is underway.
- m. Moderators should remember that the Association's forums are open to all. No individual or group of regular contributors should be given preferential treatment. Forums should always be a welcome space for all participants and new posters should be encouraged.

## **10. Support from OUSA Controller**

- a. OUSA Controller is a virtual identity, managed by Association staff. The OUSA Controller identity operates during office hours from Monday to Friday and can be contacted via a generic mailbox at [ousa-controller@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-controller@open.ac.uk)
- b. Formal complaints about any matters to do with the Association's online public forums should be addressed to the OUSA Controller in the first instance with 'complaint' in the subject heading.
- c. General enquiries can also be sent to the OUSA Controller mailbox and will be answered as soon as possible, but it is advisable to first seek an answer via Moderators Discussion, whichever is most appropriate. If an issue requires an urgent response, the mail should be marked "urgent" so that it may be given priority. Please only use the "urgent" identifier when necessary to ensure the most urgent matters are addressed efficiently.
- d. OUSA Controller will make every effort to answer enquiries or deal with problems as soon as possible. It would be helpful if subject lines could clearly indicate the nature of the problem or enquiry (e.g. Advice required on X, moderator application, moderator resignation, Ruling required on Y and so on) to assist the efficient operation of the mailbox.

## **SECTION C - FORUM REQUESTS**

## **1. Introduction**

Within reason, the Association is happy to make provision for whatever forum topics members want to discuss with other students if these are consistent with the Code of Conduct and the rules placed on all users of the service. However, there are several practical factors which need to be considered when we receive requests for new forums.

We do not want large numbers of forums used by very small numbers of students. This can be an undue burden on both the Association's and the University's administrative and technical support. It can also cause unnecessary structural layers making the service more difficult to manage and navigate. We will also seek to avoid forums of a repetitive or similar subject matter. We will seek to avoid forums which go beyond self-help and which might imply that they are a source of expert advice. This could give rise to liability for the Association or the University or both. We will undertake regular housekeeping on the system to merge or remove unused forums.

## **2. Requesting a Forum**

All new forum requests will be handled by the OUSA Controller, who will need to receive support from a good number of students for the forum to be created. Once validity of the new forum is accepted, the OUSA Controller will seek moderators for the forum before creation.

Any new forum request must include the details of any persons volunteering to act as moderators. OUSA Controller will be able to advise if needed. If the proposed moderators are not existing moderators, then they will need to make an application in the usual way (see section 6 above).

## **3. Processing Your Request for a new forum**

Decisions on requests that appear straightforward to implement will be devolved by a senior member of the Operations team of the Association. Considerations include what support there has been, the adequacy of the Code of Conduct and sufficient volunteers to Moderate the forum.

If the request appears as if it may be problematic for example:

- there is an issue with the Code of Conduct.
- the discussion about that forum request has provoked a divided debate which might prove difficult to moderate later.
- there is a potential conflict with the identity or reputation of the Association or the University.

Then it will be referred to OUSA Controller.

The decision of whether to approve a particular forum request and which students will be appointed to moderate the Forum will be entirely at the discretion of the OUSA Controller.

Once a decision has been reached by the Association a message will be posted in Moderators SLACK either confirming a timetable for the creation of the forum or a reason for the forum not being created. All new forums start up on a six-month probationary period during which the conduct on the forum and usage will be kept under review. At the end of this period the forum will either be confirmed or withdrawn.

## **SECTION D – COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES**

### **1. Introduction**

- a. OU Student Association public forums are open to everyone with access to the University's computing services. The University allows the Association to run this service on the understanding that the Association takes responsibility for ensuring that the University's Student Computing Policy and online communication systems guidelines are adhered to and where necessary enforced. Details can be found at:  
<http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/computing>
- b. All users of Association forums must familiarise themselves with the contents of these documents and operate within the stated rules. For all purposes relating to Association's Forums, references to 'the rules' means those specified within the documents referred to above. Where users of the services are in

breach of the conduct required the Association reserves the right to limit or terminate their use of the services.

- c. All users must read the code of conduct for forums they wish to post on. When posts are made by users who are excluded from specified groups their post may be automatically removed by the forum moderator/s and their permissions to access all forums may be removed. Depending on the nature of the post this process may be followed up by a formal disciplinary action. Where possible an informal warning will be issued in a first instance.
- d. Elections and By-election forums can only be accessed by the current members of the OU Students Association. Forum users who are no longer members of the OU Students Association are not allowed to contribute and participate with the Elections and By-elections therefore their post will be automatically removed and their permissions to access all forums may be removed for the duration of the Elections and By-elections. Their permissions will be reinstated once they contact the OUSA Controller ([ousa-controller@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-controller@open.ac.uk)) and ask for their permission to be reinstated
- e. These Procedures explain:
  - what to do when another user is in breach of the rules
  - how breaches of the rules are dealt with
  - what action can be taken if there is a suspicion of an unfair treatment
- f. To avoid contradictions or inconsistency in the treatment of members in relation to online conduct as opposed to conduct in general, these are the only procedures which will apply to conduct in Association forums. However, issues arising from these may be referred for consideration under the Association general disciplinary procedures if they fall under these.
- g. If it is necessary for any matter dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure to be considered by an Appeal Panel of the Student Leadership Team (SLT), no less than three members of the SLT will be involved.
- h. It is not acceptable to try to bypass these procedures by writing directly to the individual mailboxes of the members of the SLT

including the President. SLT members will not enter private discussions on matters which are, or which ought properly to be, the subject of these procedures.

## **2. Complaints Procedure**

### **a. Stage 1 of the Complaints Procedure**

In the first instance any complaint about conduct in an Association forum should be taken up with the moderator of the forum concerned using the 'Contact Your Moderator' forum. You should receive a response within three working days of submitting your complaint, but not necessarily have your complaint resolved in that time.

If you remain dissatisfied following a response from the moderator(s) you may raise your complaint under Stage 2 of the procedure.

### **b. Stage 2 of the Complaints Procedure**

If you have a complaint about the Association forum moderation or you remain dissatisfied after raising a complaint with the moderators, you can submit a formal complaint to the OUSA Controller who can be contacted at [ousa-controller@open.ac.uk](mailto:ousa-controller@open.ac.uk) . You will receive an acknowledgement to confirm that your message has been received.

You should be precise about the nature of your complaint and you will need to cite details of the message(s) about which you are complaining by giving the name of the forum, the subject thread, name of poster and time of posting. You may use quotes from messages to help explain your complaint, but this will not be a substitute for providing the full details of where the message(s) can be found.

Association Complaints are managed by the staff members at the Association Office through the OUSA Controller. If a senior member of Association staff is satisfied that your complaint is relatively straightforward and can be handled at that level, you will receive a response within 5 working days. If the judgement of staff is that the matter is more complex or could require serious disciplinary action it will be referred to the Associate Director of People and Services for stage 3 of the procedure. You will receive a confirmation email about how your complaint will be dealt with within 5 working days.



If you have received a response to your complaint from a member of staff under Stage 2 of the procedure but you are not satisfied with that response, you may raise your complaint to Stage 3 of the procedure.

### c. Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure

Where a senior member of Association staff judges your complaint to be complex and/or potentially requiring a serious disciplinary action, or where you remain unhappy following a receipt of a response from a member of staff under Stage 2 of the procedure, the matter will be considered by the Associate Director of People and Services.

Where a complaint is being referred to Stage 3 by OUSA Controller they will make other necessary enquiries in order to provide the Associate Director of People and Services with all the relevant information. Where you are raising a complaint at Stage 3 of the procedure, this should be sent to the OUSA Controller with the subject title 'Stage 3'. You should provide a clear and concise explanation of why you are not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 2.

You will receive a response within 15 working days. If for any reason it is not possible to give you a full response to your complaint within 15 working days, then you will be informed of the delay by the OUSA Controller and receive an indication of when you can expect a full response.

If your complaint is not upheld, you will be given an explanation of the decision.

The decision of the Associate Director of People and Services will be final as far as Association's Complaints Procedure is concerned. However, if you believe that the Association has failed to comply with or uphold the University's Student Code of Computing Conduct or the Online systems guidelines, or has not acted in accordance with its own stated procedures, then you do have the right to submit a complaint under the University's Complaints Procedure which can be accessed from the following area:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/students/charter/essential-documents/procedure-complaints-about-the-ou-students-association-ousa>

You will be expected to provide the University with evidence of where the Association has failed.

### **3. Disciplinary Procedure**

#### **a. Introduction**

Where the Association has evidence that a user of the forums is not complying with the rules the Association will attempt in the first instance to resolve any problems informally. However, where it appears that the conduct concerned is serious or deliberate, then the Association shall not hesitate to use the formal disciplinary procedure.

Please be aware that the Association only has jurisdiction over the activity on the Association online forums and cannot deal with problems that occur in other areas of the Open University's Online Teaching services. These should be referred to Forum moderators if appropriate or alternatively complaints should be made in writing to [complaints-appeals@open.ac.uk](mailto:complaints-appeals@open.ac.uk) providing the detail of where the problem is occurring and these will be directed to the administrators concerned.

For areas outside of the University's service, for example Facebook or Twitter, complaints should be addressed to the relevant system administrator.

Whilst the initial stages of this Disciplinary Procedure have been specifically tailored to deal with the online forums conduct, the latter stages comprise The Association Disciplinary Procedure covering the conduct of all Association members in all situations.

Similarly, if it is deemed necessary by the OUSA Controller a contributor may have their access suspended or modified, without prejudice to the outcome until an investigation, which might include an appeal has been concluded. This is to allow for unacceptable online conduct to be treated on an equal footing with unacceptable conduct in any other situation. In the case of users of the forum services who are not Association members, where it may be necessary to exclude such users from the forum services, findings on their conduct will be reported to the University. Any suspension made under these provisions will be reviewed by the Associate Director of People and Services within 5 days of being imposed.

#### **b. Informal Action**

Where the Association decides that a user's conduct within the forum network is not acceptable, but that it is a relatively minor or unintentional breach of the rules, consideration will be given to the

use of an informal warning, or a temporary suspension of access permissions in case of closed forums for specified groups of students.

Informal warnings are intended to draw attention to, or clarify, the conduct that is unacceptable. As part of an informal warning the person concerned may be required to issue an explanation, either to an individual or to a forum. Where an informal warning has been issued this and any inappropriate messages concerned will be kept on file for a specified period (see table below, section 3d) and may be referred to in the future if there is a need to take further action.

Informal warnings will most commonly be issued by the OUSA Controller.

### **c. Formal Action**

Where the Association decides that:

- the inappropriate conduct is more serious, or
- where previous informal warnings have been ineffective, or
- where a user has more than two current informal warnings.

Formal disciplinary action may be taken.

This may include disciplinary actions ranging from a period of “read only” access to any or all forums through exclusion from one or more forums, temporary exclusion from the Association forums or permanent exclusion from the Association’s Forum areas.

Whenever formal disciplinary action against a user of the Association’s services is considered necessary, the person will be informed of the case against them and will be given the opportunity to put their side of the story. Once a decision has been made, the person will be informed of the basis of the decision and any disciplinary action to be applied. At that time the person will also be reminded of any right of appeal.

Although there are different levels of sanction under this procedure, users cannot assume that they are entitled to any particular number of warnings or levels of disciplinary action. The Association reserves the right to apply the level of disciplinary action which it feels appropriate in all the circumstances. The higher-level disciplinary actions will only be awarded by the Associate Director of People and Services and in the case of the more serious disciplinary actions, there will be a right of appeal to the SLT.

#### d. Summary of Disciplinary Procedure

The table below summarises the key features of action under this Disciplinary Procedure. The word “exclusion” means the removal of all access to Association’s public forums.

ACTION	AUTHORITY TO ISSUE *	APPEAL RIGHTS	TIME HELD ON FILE
Apology required	OUSA Controller	No	3 months
Informal warning	OUSA Controller	No	3 months
Formal warning with no disciplinary action	OUSA Controller with the approval of the Head of Operations	No	6 months
Read only for up to 1 month	OUSA Controller with the approval of the Head of Operations.	Yes - Associate Director of People and Services	2 years
Temporary exclusion of up to 1 month	OUSA Controller with the approval of the Head of Operations	Yes - Associate Director of People and Services	2 years
Read only for a period over 1 month	Associate Director of People and Services	Yes -SLT Appeal panel	2 years from completion of the period of read only access
Temporary exclusion for a period over 1 month	Associate Director of People and Services	Yes – SLT Appeal panel	2 years from completion of the period of exclusion
Permanent exclusion	Associate Director of People and Services	Yes - SLT Appeal Panel and approved by the Association President	No expiry time

\* This refers to the lowest level of authority necessary to issue the disciplinary action.

