Cath Hello everyone, we’re here on the Milton Keynes campus today and we’re going to have a chat about the new Student Voice website. So first of all let’s go around and have everybody introduce themselves. So I’m Cath Brown I’m the STEM faculty rep with the Students Association.

Stephanie I’m Stephanie Stubbins and I’m vice president community of the Students Association.

Jerard Hi I’m Jerard Bretts assistant director student and staff engagement at the Open University in Academic Services.

Jan Hi I’m Jan Campbell-Wood, I'm the student engagement project manager.

Cath Okay so first of all what is this new Student Voice website? Well you can actually get to it from your student home. So if you go onto your student home page and then you click on the thing at the top that says ‘community’, one of the options you’ll see there will be the Student Voice website. So that’s how we get to it. So why is it there? Jerard would you like to tell us how it came about?

Jerard Yes working closely with the Students Association we realised that we needed to do more to explain to students about how we get feedback from them. We get feedback from so many different channels for our students, we wanted to explain the story of how we do that and we also wanted to close that feedback loop and tell students what we actually do as a result of all the feedback we get so we have this You said – We did section which covers what the university is doing as a result of what students have been telling us.

Cath Yes I've been having a look at the You said – We did section and it’s really interesting because I think one of our priorities as students is to know that actually if we say something that someone’s going to pay some attention to us. So I found this one here for example, this one came from the Physical Sciences Board of Studies and they said that students had told them that they’d wanted to have the VLE materials and resources of online modules, such as questions in science, S111, available to them from the start of the module, so that they had everything available upfront. And the response from the Board of Studies was to say that the full suite of resources for that module and some of their other modules as well are in future going to be made available as soon as the VLE side’s open. So I think that was a really nice example of closing the feedback loop.

Jan Yeah lots work in that way actually, there's a lot of examples on the site.
Stephanie: So what are the different ways that students can get involved through Student Voice on the website?

Jerard: Yes, I mean the other aspect of the website is opportunities basically. We have as well as the How we listen section which talks about the surveys and other things that we do to hear the student voice; we have a section on opportunities where we advertise all sorts of different things that you can get involved in, for example, there's the University Student Consultative Process and we have face-to-face meetings taking place next month in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales and some online meetings as well where we seek views of students on particular topics. So that's one way of getting involved. We also have a new scheme which is called the Student Partners Scheme whereby if students are interested in running little mini projects to improve the student experience they can put in a proposal and proposals will get considered and those that are successful will be funded for little projects. So there's quite a lot of different opportunities that you can get involved in with the university directly and the Students Association that we advertise regularly on the site. Jan did you want to talk about the shadowing scheme as well?

Jan: Certainly, yeah. The site is updated all the time with different opportunities as they happen and one of them that Jerard's just alluded to is the student shadowing scheme. This started pretty much earlier this year and it's an opportunity for students to visit a member of staff or an OU area to see what happens there and to give their feedback and the ones we've had so far have been really successful. Certainly we send out evaluations to staff and to students but the ones that have come back from staff so far every single one of them said it's been invaluable to have the student input to the small area of the OU that they've seen. And from the OU's point of view that's really what we need, we need to understand what students feel about what's happening and passing back to them as well what they can actually do to change things and this is one of the things they can change from the students. We've had a good take-up but we need more really. We need more students to volunteer and we need other areas to volunteer as well. We've only got one vacancy at the moment that's been listed, that's for six places, and it's a fantastic opportunity, it's a few days with LTI and if you go to the website you can take a look but I've got another probably about six to eight active areas that I'm in discussion with at the moment trying to set up those opportunities and we've already agreed about 12 to 15 different opportunities that people are lined up and ready to take, half of which have happened already.
Stephanie: How much time would a student need to put into something like student shadowing and what about expenses?

Jan: Yeah good point. It all depends. I mean students come from all different areas don’t they so sometimes they can give a lot of time and some just a little time. When the hosts volunteer their opportunity they say how long they think would be a good time to visit and it can range from half a day to five days. Most have been a day. We’ve got some that are coming up that are a few days but in reality the student chooses the one that’s most suitable for them so if they think they can give three days volunteer for the three day one. If they can only manage to take a day off work from caring for example, volunteer for the one day. We do pay travel and subsistence as well so we don’t want you to be out of pocket if you do it.

Stephanie: That’s important.

Jan: It’s really important. We want this to be open to all students and we’re cutting down as many barriers as we can to do that.

Stephanie: Okay. There’s also opportunities to volunteer through the Students Association, LER which is Learning Experience Representative.

Cath: Representative feedback.

Stephanie: That’s changed hasn’t it? And central committee representative would you like to say more about that Cath?

Cath: Yes of course. The central committee representatives are students who represent the student view on OU committees. Those committees are often within faculties, for example, they might be the Board of Studies. So for example in the faculty I represent there’s a board of studies for maths and stats, for life, health and chemical sciences etc. for the other four schools within it. So that involves someone going to the meetings which might be maybe three times a year, obviously reading the papers in advance, giving the student view, being asked for their input. They also have a chance to talk to other central committee representatives as well. Learning experience representatives are really the eyes and ears of the association reps out there among the, shall I say, normal student population. So as a faculty rep I have learning experience reps come and tell me about any issues that are coming up in modules and sometimes we might also ask them to go and find out some student views for us. So it’s an absolutely vital role there.
Stephanie Yeah and we’ve also got an opportunity next month to talk to your Students Association elected representatives. There’s one in Canterbury where I will be hosting with other CEC members and…

Cath There’s one in Birmingham where I will be hosting with other CEC members. So you can’t get away from us people!

Stephanie If you’re interested apply. So would you like to tell us more about the other opportunities like the graduate internship?

Jan Yeah that one is still developing. We hope to have some roles that are going to be advertised for graduate interns and they will be properly paid roles but obviously because they’re not ready to be advertised yet I can’t go into too much detail but as soon as we do know about them and we can actually put something out there then there will be information on the site as well. So the Student Voice website really is where you need to go to find out about some of these things.

Cath Jerard could I ask you a little bit more about the consultation opportunities you mentioned? You mentioned the face-to-face consultations coming up but there are other ways for students as well and other ways for them to suggest consultation topics?

Jerard Yes I think Steph was talking about the boards of studies each board of studies also has a consultative forum and they’re often looking for volunteers. So these are online consultative forums and every board of studies has one. So that’s one opportunity that is out there. We also have a university students online consultative forum and that runs all the time. And we bring to the university students consultative forum a whole range of different issues that the universities are addressing, so if you want to influence university policy and its implementation then getting your voice heard on the university students consultative forum is one way forward. And if you go to the Student Voice website you’ll find a link to the student consultation are and if you’re interested in volunteering for the online university consultative forum then that’s a good thing to think about doing.

Stephanie Yeah. Students can actually go in and see the consultations even if they’re not volunteering.

Jerard That’s right yeah, every student of the university can go in and look at the consultations as they happen and what we also make sure we do is provide a summary of the discussion and also make sure that we close that feedback loop I mentioned earlier. So for every consultation we publish a
document that says what the university’s doing as a result of that. So if you
go to the website you’ll see an archive of all the consultations we’ve had in
the past and you can look at the current ones. And also it’s not a kind of top
down approach and it isn’t always the university that comes up with the
topics, students come up with topics as well. We’ve got a forum there for
students to suggest topics for consultation. So if that’s something you think,
oh the university should be considering issue X then tell us and we have a
group that looks at all the ideas that students and staff have and who knows
your topic could be the next one that comes up.

Cath  I can confirm that does happen. In the past there’s been three different ones
that have come from ones I’ve suggested.

Jerard  Brilliant.

Stephanie  There’s also another way that students can put ideas forward and that's
through Student Ideas isn’t it?

Jerard  Oh yes. Thanks for mentioning that that's our experimental platform that is a
kind of crowd-sourcing ideas platform that we’re trialling at the moment and
what we put up on there is a broad topic and ask for new ideas for ways of
doing things on that and students can vote for each other’s ideas and vote
them up or vote them down. And what we do is we take those ideas that
students have on the Student Ideas platform, and go to our colleagues
around the university and ask them are these ideas runners? Do you think
these will work? And the different areas of the university consider these
ideas and we only started the platform fairly recently and what we’re doing
now from the first wave of ideas is going round to our colleagues in the
different departments and saying, “Are you going to take these forward?”
and we’re going to be publishing on the site the results of that.

Stephanie  And can any student go on to Student Ideas or is it just places?

Jerard  Well you can't just immediately sign up you do have to go through a process
of applying it’s just because the platform wouldn’t support say 100,000
students but I’m sure that if people are interested we could fit them on.

Jan  Yeah it’s the very idea, certainly there’s a lot of capacity still so there
shouldn’t be any reason why students couldn’t go there and as to actually
getting access to the site although it appears you have to apply in reality it
just shows that you’re a student, that’s all we need to check. So you have to
fill in a very short form that has your student identifier on it and the email
address you use and that's it. And then shortly you'll get an email to say there you go you're a member."

Stephanie  So we want a lot more activity on Student Ideas then?

Jan      Yeah I mean we're just developing new campaigns at the moment and as Jerard said we've run a few campaigns so far and there's a lot of activity going on behind the scenes and we're very, very close to feeding back on all of those ideas that were submitted, the people that joined early, thank you for that. And we're going to put new campaigns on. So I anybody hasn't taken a look at it yet go and take a look but you need to come back because there will be another question on there about something and asking for student feedback on.

Cath     That's good. Going back to the website a little bit we've explored some of the tabs on there and one of them mentioned was the You Said – We Did with the account of the feedback, we've got some others there as well, for example there's the How We Listen. So that's telling you about the ways, as it suggests, that the OU are listening to students. So there are some links down the bottom talking about things like surveys, panels and consultation, initiatives and the Student Ideas website that Jan was just talking about. There's the You Said – We Did, there's Get Involved, so in the Get Involved section you can see some details of the consultancy of meetings and you can filter those according to whereabouts things are, the duration and so on or you can just have a scroll down and see which ones you're interested in. You'll also find there's one tab on there where some information is being put up about me and the transformation project. Okay so do you think we've covered most of the website?

Jan      Yeah we haven't mentioned the partnership scheme have we?

Jerard  Only briefly I'll mention that very briefly. What we're keen to do here is to seek ideas from students for new ways of doing things in terms of improving the students' experience so we will fund students to work on mini projects and if you go to the website you'll see an explanation of the scheme and there's a form to apply and what we're looking for is things which will make things better for students and we'd be willing to fund up to 15 days work for each project and what we're interested in is projects where they're student-led but also staff as well as students could work on these projects. So it could be staff-led jointly with students or it could be solely student-led. So it could be a group of students working together or an individual student with an idea taking it forward.
Stephanie: So in theory if a student puts a student idea up that could turn into a project could they follow through and apply to be on their own project?

Jan: Certainly yeah.

Jerard: Yeah I mean the Student Ideas platform could be a breeding ground for seeding ideas that then turn into these mini projects.

Stephanie: Sounds exciting.

Jerard: Yeah.

Cath: Is it really open about everything? I mean I find the idea really exciting as well as a student I particularly enjoy working with staff together collaboratively to work on things that improve things for students so anything academic, student experience, general?

Jan: Well as long as it enhances the student experience it’s worthwhile looking into. There is a panel that will decide which of the applications will actually be funded so obviously it will be gauged against what the student body or the Open University will be able to achieve with that but yes it’s open to many ideas and if you’re not sure and you want to discuss it come back to us and we’re more than happy to discuss the idea to see if we can help you develop it further.

Stephanie: As Cath mentioned the transformation page would you like to say a bit more about that page?

Jerard: Yeah I mean that’s going to be a go to place for news about the transformation so if students are interested in finding out where the university is with the transformation, obviously it’s a long term process we will be publishing news there. There’s also an opportunity through that page to give feedback on the transformation and there’s some FAQs there as well. So there’s FAQs, news, articles and an opportunity to feedback to us. So it’s a bit of a hub really for the university to tell our students about the transformation going forward and also it’s a two-way opportunity really for students to come back to us and say what they think about the transformation as well.

Stephanie: Yeah it sounds good.

Cath: And we’ve got links throughout the website as well to feed into the Student Association website because as we said at the beginning this is very much
a joint project overall. So the opportunity to feed into the academic representation side of the student website links to our forums and so on.

Jerard Yeah the site as it is at the moment is the first phase of development we’re going to do more to the site to develop it and improve it. For example, we’re going to have hopefully a section on student stories where students tell us about their experience of being partners or having a shadowing experience.

Stephanie And if they’ve had a chance to give their student voice over they can tell a story about it.

Jerard Yes so it’s a place to tell your story basically.

Stephanie So the website although it’s up is still a work in progress isn’t it?

Jan It is definitely it’s in its first stage at the moment and we’re developing it still.

Jerard Yeah we’ve got a lot of ambitions for it.

Stephanie So it would be good if students wanted to let us know if they think of any improvements as well?

Jan Well there is a link at the bottom of the page on the website ‘Just tell us about the website.’

Cath So there is!

Jerard Yeah feedback click on the link. Do tell us yeah. Click on that link.

Cath A nice bright pink button I've found here.

Jerard We do read all the feedback that's given.

Jan And it comes directly to the team.

Stephanie The Student Voice website we want it to be a more student area, we want them to feel this is their area to go to.

Jan And that's the purpose of it.

Cath And we can just confirm that they do have student representation on the team.
Stephanie Because that's us.

Jerard And I'd like to think it's a good example of students and staff working together in partnership.

Cath Yes absolutely I agree.

Jerard Because I think that's something we want to do more of at the university is have more joint decision-making and working more in partnership between the university and its student body.

Cath And that's very much what we want too.

Jan Yes.

Stephanie Okay have we covered everything?

Jan I think we have. Well thank you very much for giving us the opportunity.

Cath Thanks very much.

Jan Thanks for listening.

Cath Thanks for listening and watching. Bye.