The Students Association carries out independent research to help us improve the services we offer students, and to better understand different aspects of the student experience.

We are very excited about our new Research Strategy for 2019-2020, which will guide how we build on our work and explore new directions for research at the Association. Please read on to learn more about our aims and objectives, and find out how you can get involved!

Our Research Aims

1. To set out a clear mechanism to prioritise research projects.

2. To enable informed decision-making within the Association.

3. To enable our student volunteers to represent OU students at the university and national levels.

4. To partner with other organisations in the UK HE sector to build on our insights into the part-time and distance-learning student experience.

5. To engage the student community in our research work and disseminate research findings in fresh and innovative ways.

Keep an eye out for these icons...

- Information relating to each of our aims.
- Links to content hosted on our website.
- Suggestions for how you can get involved!
We regularly invite ideas for research projects from our student leadership team, and are looking to put in place a process that enables them to collectively identify which projects they would like us to take forward. This also ensures that our research is timely and makes the best use of available resources.

**Aim 1**

To set out a clear mechanism to prioritise research projects

**Background**

We regularly invite ideas for research projects from our student leadership team, and are looking to put in place a process that enables them to collectively identify which projects they would like us to take forward. This also ensures that our research is timely and makes the best use of available resources.

**Key objectives**

- To introduce an annual cycle for inviting project proposals from the student leadership team.
- To ensure research topics are meaningful for students and engage the wider student community.

**Next steps**

The student leadership team are encouraged to follow a structured research pro-forma, and their ideas are then shared at Central Executive Committee (CEC) meetings. Once an idea has been collectively approved by the CEC, the research team will progress the project.

**Get involved**

Did you know that you can read the papers discussed at the quarterly meetings of the student leadership team?

Click here to access the Research Strategy paper.

Click here to visit our main research page.

Click here for our one-stop guide for all things research!
Aim 2

To enable informed decision-making within the Association

Background
We undertake research projects on a variety of topics, supporting different arms of the Association's work. Research ideas are seen as falling under the three broad categories listed below, each focusing on a different area of the student experience. We want to work towards achieving a balance of topics under these categories.

Key research areas

- The work of the Association and the needs of our student membership.
- Study experience and engagement with the OU.
- Topics that touch on ongoing trends within the wider HE sector.

Next steps
We will support the student leadership team in identifying research topics that relate to the areas mentioned above.

We also follow policy discussions on platforms such as Wonkhe (which also has a special student union arm) to keep abreast of the latest news and HE trends.

Get involved

Did you know that our most recent research project explored how OU students volunteer with the Association?

Click here to read the Volunteering Research Report.

Subscribe to the Association's monthly newsletter to learn about upcoming research events. These include opportunities to participate in a range of online and face-to-face events.
Our student volunteers work hard towards improving the student experience, and this includes participating in our research projects. Under this aim we want to encourage dialogue between student volunteers and the wider student community, and ensure that we are giving voice to the experience of part-time and distance learners.

**Aim 3**

To enable our student volunteers to represent OU students at the university and national levels

**Background**

Our student volunteers work hard towards improving the student experience, and this includes participating in our research projects. Under this aim we want to encourage dialogue between student volunteers and the wider student community, and ensure that we are giving voice to the experience of part-time and distance learners.

**Key objectives**

- Identify ways to better support the work of student volunteers.
- Tie research activities with other Association events such as Freshers and the Association Conference.
- Identify ways to engage a diverse audience with our research work.

**Next steps**

We are tying our research activities, such as volunteer recruitment and induction, with events such as Freshers 2019 and the OU’s Student Voice Week 2019.

We have also facilitated student-led focus groups between our research volunteers (see below) and the wider student community.

**Get involved**

Did you know that we have a research-focused volunteering role? It’s called Students Voice Researcher (SVR).

Click here to read SVR reports, or quickly browse their one-page summaries.

Interested in the SVR role? All current students can apply for this role, and we especially welcome students new to the Association!
Aim 4

To partner with other organisations in the UK HE sector to build on our insights into the part-time and distance-learning student experience

Background

We believe that in articulating the voice of part-time and distance learners, we have an opportunity to share our work with the wider Higher Education (HE) sector in the UK. This means participating in dialogues about HE trends, and reflecting on how these impact on the experience of OU students.

Key objectives

- Identify specific topics where we could exchange ideas and practice with the wider UK HE sector.
- Continue to share our research work at conferences and similar events organised within the HE sector.

Next steps

As part of our training releases for Student Voice volunteers, we have introduced policy-focused releases. These releases signpost student volunteers to recent reports on the HE sector and offer tips on relating these trends to their role as Student Voice representatives.

Our very first release in 2019 was themed around part-time and mature learning, and more are planned for 2020.

In the news

In 2019 we presented our work at the Enhancing Student Engagement Conference, organised by The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP).

Our first Research Symposium was also organised in 2019, with talks by OU staff members and our student volunteers.
**Aim 5**

To engage the student community in our research work and disseminate research findings in fresh and innovative ways

**Background**

Our research work is all about OU students - that's you! We recognise the need to provide a range of opportunities for students to participate in research, and to ensure that we present our work in a way that engages our student volunteers as well as the wider student community. Together, we can make a positive impact on the student experience!

**Key objectives**

- Exploring the potential for 'micro-volunteering' as part of research-focused volunteer roles.
- Use a variety of formats such as infographics and videos to raise awareness of our research work, and maintain a strong research presence at Association events.

**Next steps**

We have worked hard to share content in a variety of formats, including videos, banners, booklets, and infographics. Short summaries of all our research reports have been made available on the Association website.

We also encourage students to share their experience of engaging in different research activities through blogs and on social media.

**Get involved**

Did you know that in 2019, we hosted our first ever Research Symposium?

Click here to read a student blog about the event.

Whether participating in an online focus group or attending a workshop, we have a range of opportunities for you! Please keep an eye out for upcoming events on the Association website.