The Students Association continues more than ever to champion the OU Student Voice and we believe that every OU student should receive an outstanding educational experience. Although our students learn at a distance, we work to ensure that they all have the opportunity to be involved in curriculum or institutional change and development. The Students Association as the representative body for OU students, is committed to working with the University to ensure that students are seen as partners in shaping their studies. We support all forms of student engagement as a means to enhance all aspects of the student experience and quality of learning and teaching. The Association provides opportunities for the student voice to be heard in many places and we continue to develop more of these whilst Student Voice remains a key focus of our Association 2020 strategy. We want to better show students how their voice is being heard by University, the wider OU community, and beyond.

Looking forward, we are seeking more ways to enhance the student voice and widen the opportunities for students to participate, and we realise we need to look at where we can improve regarding students whose voice is not often heard. We are making some progress with some minority groups, however need to ensure they are not overlooked and that their voice matters. We continue our efforts to reach out into the wider world, and act as the voice of the part-time distance learning student to Westminster and the National Parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are an ambitious team and we have set ourselves a mission to ensure that every student matters and that the University and beyond continues to listen to our students stories.

Peter Cowan, Vice President Education & Amelia Gackowska, Vice President Student Voice
Reading through this report I have realised how much we have accomplished and I am proud of the part I played as VP Education 2016-18. The Student Voice Bulletin was mentioned in my election manifesto and thanks to the staff team it has evolved into a better newsletter than I had imagined. Central Committee Representatives (CCR) sat on most OU governance committees and argued strongly to put across the views of students about all academic issues and we introduced monthly online catch-ups to encourage more engagement among reps.

We fought against the confidentiality challenge we faced and negotiated some leeway which I hope will improve in the new academic year. The Student Voice Induction Day and The Student Voice Symposium in January went well as did the April CCR Seminar, all of which have had very positive feedback.

We started a new Kitemark Project which 'will explore the feasibility of introducing a University-wide kitemark signalling that a project or programme has completed meaningful engagement with students'. This is an exciting project which is in its early stage and I look forward to hearing of its progress over the coming year.
My name is Caroline, outgoing Vice President Representation and Research. I have been an Open University student since 2011, having completed my BA in Business and International Development in 2014 and finished my MBA, also with the Open University, in 2018. Having had both undergraduate and postgraduate experience as an Open University student, I originally chose to stand for the role of Vice President Representation and Research predominantly because I wanted to become more involved in the student community and represent the student voice. Since the start of my term we have been able to work together with our Faculty Association Representatives (FARs) and Learning Experience Representatives (LERs) who gather evidence on academic issues, such as tuition, module material and accessibility. There is a lively forum space to engage with each other and identify common themes that might arise from student feedback, while also liaising with students who are part of formal governance committees.

2017-18 brought in the new Student Voice Café area where all of our volunteers could talk about matters affecting them and students in a casual environment. It has been an excellent year for Research at the Students Association – with the Volunteering Research Project in its final stages, which will serve as an important evidence base in which roles can be developed. This project was particularly exciting because it involved holding focus groups with students gathering primary research data and the chance for students to visit the Open University Campus in Milton Keynes. It has been great to be involved in and champion the new Volunteer Researcher role at the Association, and also continue to develop the Learner Experience Rep role as it enters its third year. I hope that the newly elected representatives will continue to raise the profile of Student Voice in a time which has been marked by change and transition.
Student Voice Volunteers

Training and networking events

7 Student Blogs on oustudents.com
3 editions of the Bulletin with
10 student led submissions
In 11 months we have had over
9,000 page visits to our Student
Voice section on oustudents.com

Responses in our 6 surveys to
the student body
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

MEET YOUR STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
In 2018 The Central Executive Team (alongside Voice and Community) progressed their Meet Your Students Association events, as recommended and agreed following the Grassroots research project in 2017. The aim of these events was for the student leadership team to liaise face to face with the student body, and for the CEC to speak with students about their study experiences. These events were designed to capture OU Student Voice, where students had the opportunity to engage with the CEC in an open discussion and where students could also bring their own topics to the table. Meetings were scheduled in Kent and Birmingham on the 6th April - topics around how OU teaching works, and the proposed changes to the OU via the Transformation Programme were on the agenda.

We considered these events excellent opportunities to tell students about how the Students Association both works for and engages its members - from what the Association does and how we can support students - to speaking about our volunteering opportunities and our affiliated societies. It was also an excellent time to promote the Conference 2018 and encourage participation either online or face to face. As an outcome of these, it is hoped that the newly elected Central Executive Committee will consider a rotating drop-in style meeting based in their preferable locations. The aim of these events are still yet to be defined, however it is suspected that they would still take a focus of Student Voice or Community.

Achievement: Successful trial of the Meet Your Students Association Events

STUDENT VOICE EVENTS: INDUCTION AND SYMPOSIUM
In January 2018 the Association Voice team and its respective officers hosted two events, the first was a Student Voice Induction event, and the other was their second Symposium. The Student Voice Induction was aimed at the new volunteers involved in voice related roles which had 28 attendees. Students gained skills as to how to navigate our complex virtual environment and shared practice about their roles in their widest sense. It brought the students together in an informal environment, and due to its success is something that we will seek deliver again in the future.

The Student Voice Symposium event was hosted on the 29th January, and on the day attracted over 100 attendees (online and in person). The Students Association delivered presentations around representation, research, what we define as a student community, with the Association President Nicci Simpson delivering a passionate speech about the (at the time) Transformation programme. The content generated from this event has gone towards training, marketing and promotion use for both the Students Association and OU. The link to view the Symposium is still available via Stadium, and short clips will also now features on the Association website.

Achievement: We delivered our first induction event for our voice volunteers and hope to continue this practice. Following the success of the 2 hour symposium in 2017, our second symposium turned into a 6 hour event with over 100 attendees.
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

RESEARCH COMMUNICATIONS
This year we have made a sustained effort to make research more approachable and to encourage more students to participate in research projects. Research communications are key to this, and we have introduced different formats to reach a bigger audience and raise awareness of our work. Our research booklet was prepared for Conference 2018 to give students a broad overview of research at the Association and highlighting how students can get involved. Reaching over 290 face-to-face delegates, these booklets offer information in a print format, and we hope to use them for other face-to-face student events.
A research video was also designed for Conference 2018 and was hosted on the webpage for our Digital Delegates. We are exploring the kind of content that this format lends itself to, such as short interviews with Student Voice representatives, animations, and summarising key findings. We plan to host these videos on the main Association website, with content being refreshed regularly. Their reach will be monitored to see if this format can be used effectively to share research findings and engage more students.

Achievement: Successfully trialled new formats to keep research fresh and engaging, with plans to build on this work in 2018/19.

KITEMARK PROJECT
The Kitemark project is part of the 2017-20 Association strategy and will explore the feasibility of introducing a University-wide Kitemark signalling that a project or programme has completed meaningful engagement with students. Early stage informal research has been conducted and an advisory group with students, Association and OU staff has been established. This group has started work on developing a tool and evaluation plan to assist with planning for and enhancing OU student engagement. VP Education supported the delivery of an update to the face-to-face delegates at Conference 2018 as part of the Student Voice session and Association staff members also produced a podcast for Conference Digital Delegates. The content of both included how the idea of the Kitemark had originated, the work completed so far and the next steps for the project. Recruitment for a new Association volunteer role was recently successful, and we have recruited a team of students to spend a day working collaboratively on campus in September 2018 ‘defining and refining’ a measure to test several OU and Association pieces of work between then and December 2018. It is hoped that the students not currently involved in other Association work will be attracted to opportunity to be involved in the future and will be able to bring skills and knowledge related to quality processes and how it could be implemented.

Achievement: The Kitemark Project continues to gather momentum, and was also featured in manifestos of students running for elected position at the Students Association
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

STUDENT VOICE TWITTER
In January 2018, the Student Voice Team launched the @OUstudentsVoice twitter account as a pilot until April 2018. The account aimed to address the need for more representation-specific information and output from the Association, in a space that was clearly defined. This was particularly evident in our 2017 satisfaction rate (44%) to the National Student Survey question ‘The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests’.

We post information about volunteering opportunities, blog posts and articles written by student representatives, polls (our best poll received over 200 votes!), hot-off-the-press Open University and Higher Education news, live events information, videos and photos.

Since the launch of the account, we have posted 300 tweets, and have 500 followers, including many Open University senior leaders and Higher Education practitioners, and on average, we gain over 30,000 impressions each month.

Achievement: Success with the trial and launch of our Student Voice Twitter account, that continues to attract followers

STUDENT CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES
The Students Association continues to be involved in the OU Consultation work, as active participants at the Consultation Management Group, and also with the face to face and online events taking place. This year the Students Association has been involved with the design and delivery of the Adobe Connect Online Consultation, which had good attendance from students and we endorse the future use of the platform for virtual meetings. At the face to face events in November 2017, the Students Association also used their time at the Student Consultation meetings to discuss the National Student Survey and what it means to take part in discussions around the results. The Central Executive Committees supported this work by asking participants about what they would like to see the Association do in order to be more prominent with this piece of work, as well as speak to students about relatable definitions of Academic Representation.

We have also been in a position to better encourage participation for representatives in the Student Consultation Forums by automatically signing volunteers up to specific activities, and supported the Boards of Studies Online Consultation Forums membership by adding ten students nominated from the Students Association.

Achievement: Successful trial of Adobe Connect Consultations in April 2018
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

STUDENT VOICE BANK
Since September 2017 the Student Voice Team have been tracking Student Voice issues and hot topics via forums and social media and then inputting these into a central spreadsheet bank. The Student Voice Bank has been proposed as a way of gathering and coordinating student views, opinions and feedback. The bank provides an easy way to link what Students say about their studies and experiences to either the Association’s strategy, or as a way to track student hot topics. In the first three months, there were a total of 61 comments added to the Student Voice Bank and 30 of these related to academic matters. The other comments were from social media activity related to student voice, gathered through the Freshers event in October. The academic related matters were then assigned to a topic or theme, for example awareness of the Students Association. The initial 3 month period of the Student Voice Bank proved it to be a valuable product in terms of collecting student opinions on a wide range of topics, and offers an easy way of monitoring these against the strategic plan of the Association. It also helps to navigate it in a direction towards what students want and how best to achieve this. The preliminary stages of the project have been successful and useful and has enabled the Association to identify the needs of students.

Achievement: Trailed this and can now explore further with the new VP Student Voice

STUDENT VOICE BULLETIN
The Student Voice Bulletin is a new project that has been well received by students. The bulletin is produced three to four times a year and includes a summary of voice related activities that students have been involved with. Articles from student representatives about meetings, training sessions attended and articles from a student’s point of view, along with highlighting the hard work that representatives do to ensure that the wider student voice is heard.

The Bulletin is still in its early stages and the aim going forward is for all the bulletin’s content to be created by students, that documents what student representatives have been involved in, that benefits the wider student population and for staff to support this by editing together all content.

Achievement: Three issues over the academic year 2017-18
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS
The trial for a new research-specific volunteering role has been successfully completed. Two student Volunteer Researchers came to the Milton Keynes campus and worked on themed projects and developed proposals for an Association Annual Members’ Survey and a refresh of the Module Delivery Project. The trial has informed our ways of working and how we develop this role in the future, the guidance and support requirements for this role, and ways of making it adjustable to both face-to-face and online participation. We identified the need for different entry-points for engaging with research - long term/short term, sustained/one-off investment of time, working individually/in groups – and will develop our offer of this role accordingly alongside our research strategy. The team will be in a position to develop this role further, and offer at least 4 new opportunities in 2018 -19

Achievement: Successful trial of the Volunteer Researcher Role, with two new students engaged and involved in our work.

STUDENT VOICE STEERING GROUP
The Students Association student and staff team have now been involved in three Student Voice Steering Group meetings at the OU. Despite changes in how the group operates and its members due to the consistently changing landscape, we have been in a position to champion the OU Student Voice, and seek for the group to provide better opportunities for student engagement. The President of the Students Association has been and will continue to be the co-chair of this group, and the Student Voice Steering Group has ambitious plans to further scope and map all student voice related activity at the OU, as well as provide a steer for all voice and engagement related work that takes place. This group will continue to establish itself within the OU, and seeks to gain members in the future that will support this happening.

Achievement: Collaborating with the Open University to develop a Student Voice Action Plan
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

STUDENT VOICE AT CONFERENCE 2018
The Student Voice team delivered an overview of some of their current work to a very full room of Conference delegates in June 2018. Vice President Education explained how her role interacts with the SV team and introduced four members of staff to talk in more detail about three key aspects of student voice work – Engage, Listen and Influence. For the ‘Engage’ part, delegates heard about how the ongoing Kitemark project feasibility study is exploring how the Association can measure and recognise meaningful student engagement within The Open University. In relation to ‘Listen’ delegates heard about how research is conducted by the Association and that recent projects had been helpful in providing evidence of student opinion to the university. The third strand explored ‘Influence’ and how the Student Voice is heard loudly and clearly in the university through volunteer student representatives on academic governance committees. Delegates were excited to hear about opportunities to be involved in Student Voice volunteering activities and since the event have made applications to specific roles. The Conference session was a whistle stop tour of some projects the team are involved with but served as a really great way to share how increasingly important the Association student voice work is.

Achievement- Facilitating a well-received session at the Students Association Conference, and gaining new applications for our volunteer roles.

LEARN ABOUT FAIR AND STUDENT SATISFACTION
A student-led team, supported by the Research and Information Officer, took the initiative to collect feedback on key student satisfaction themes. Held during the Students Association Conference (June 2018), this activity encouraged student delegates to share their thoughts on ‘student feedback’, ‘learning community’, and ‘information and advice’ (each of these topics was covered in separate questionnaires). Engagement was good, with 58 questionnaires being returned. Some highlights of delegates’ feedback were the need for clearer information on how student feedback is taken forward within the university, better visibility of spaces where students can talk to each other as members of a learning community, and the need for more face-to-face events. This feedback informed the Student Satisfaction Stand at the OU’s Learn About Fair (July 2018), with two students who had collected the feedback (including the Deputy President elect) attending the event and talking to university staff.

This was a very good example of the Association and the OU working in partnership to gather and discuss student feedback. Such events are key to informing ongoing discussions within the University on how to improve student satisfaction, one example being the Student Satisfaction Improvement Working Group. The Association continues to encourage the university to raise awareness of the changes and improvements made in response to student feedback, and build on the work of student representatives in taking student concerns forward within university committees.

Achievement: Successful student-led initiative that helped the Association gather student views and take them forward to OU staff attending the Learn About Fair.
Overview of Student Voice and engagement activity

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY
Over the past few years student representatives and Association staff have been involved in various work and projects surrounding the NSS. Whether that be through speaking on NSS matters at committees or working groups, or working alongside the OU to present ideas for better communication work in order for the OU to reach the threshold needed for public score publication. The OU Students Association takes the National Student Survey seriously; it provides insight into student experiences at the Open University and helps the Students Association to make changes in order to better meet student needs.

In November 2017 the Students Association utilised the piloted StudentIdeas platform to launch a new campaign based around the results of Question 26 of the National Students Survey. The campaign asked students to be reflective of what Academic Representation is and invited ideas as to how the Students Association can develop future practice.

The Students Association also used the Student Consultative Meeting held in November 2017 as a chance to engage students in a dialogue about Academic Representation and hosted small workshops in the Association-allocated time with themes around ‘Listening’, ‘Taking Action’ and ‘Responding’ to the OU Student Voice. The feedback from the workshops, the Student Ideas platform and their online consultation in the same topics were drawn together into our first Academic Representative you said we did document that features on oustudents.com.

Achievement: Consultation on Academic Representation – You said we did

SUPPORTING DEPARTMENTS - STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS AND STAFF WORKSHOPS
In early 2018, the President and VP Education sent a letter to the Open University's Boards of Studies, giving them encouragement for supporting student dialogue and conversation. As a result of sending this letter, members of the Central Executive Committee and Student Voice team were involved in speaking to Boards of Studies members to present ideas for student voice activity and engagement. This activity took place in Psychology, Languages, and Physical Sciences. As well as signposting to resources, and giving advice to staff about best practice in student engagement – the Students Association were able to support the creation of a focus group based on Employability in Arts and Humanities. Six students were invited to give their feedback and join academics on the Milton Keynes Campus. A staff member and student were also invited to host a staff facing workshop for Politics, Economics, Geography and Development which was very successful, and created further opportunities for the Association to support departmental initiative. Now that these types of events have run successfully, we would look forward to supporting more OU departments with focus groups and activities facing both staff and students.

Achievement: Running workshops and focus groups alongside OU colleges, to support their student voice efforts.
**Wins for students**

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS**
The Student Voice team have worked hard this year to engage with postgraduate research students at The Open University in order to better understand and represent them. Perhaps the most significant achievement is that responsibility for postgraduate representation and engagement is now expressly in the remit of the Deputy President, which symbolises a clear prioritisation of Postgraduate research student representation. In October and November 2017, we held three postgraduate research student ‘drop-in’ sessions in the Association’s Student Zone, giving postgraduate research students and our Central Executive Committee the opportunity to meet and discuss any issues they had faced during their induction period, and to enable new postgraduate research students to learn more about the work of the Students Association.

We also conducted a ‘PGR Knowledge Exchange’ focus group, led by the Vice President Administration 2016-18. Attendees gave feedback as to what representation, engagement and support they need and how they would like to engage with us.

We have worked closely with the Graduate School Network and a PhD student to establish a PubhD series in Milton Keynes, hosted at The Open University Walton Hall campus, open to any research students and regularly attended by those studying at The Open University and nearby Cranfield University. We have produced some postgraduate research-specific content on our website (oustudents.com/student-voice) that details the work we have done in line with our strategic objectives, and how Postgraduate students fit into the academic governance and decision making structure at The Open University.

*Achievement: Fulfilling Association strategic aim, and developing new networks to explore. We will continue to work closely alongside the Graduate School Network, and further develop engagement with Postgraduate research students.*

**OFFICE 365 AND REMOTE INTERNET ACCESS FOR OU STUDENTS**
The provision of Eduroam has been tirelessly campaigned for over a number of years by Students Association volunteers including your Vice President Student Support. This has been a topic close to our hearts as we know that gaining reliable and affordable internet access isn’t easy for all students. The Open University is due to provide access to Eduroam to OU students, a service which allows users to access the internet for free from Wi-Fi enabled devices (phones, laptops, tablets) in higher education institutions worldwide. This improvement is expected to come hand in hand with Office software (Microsoft Office 365) being made available to OU students free of charge. We understand that both of these developments will be offered to a limited cohort in first instance and will hopefully be extended student-wide.

*Achievement: Campaigns for Eduroam have paid off!*
Supporting our Representatives through a time of change...

Student representatives were involved in work stream meetings, workshops, governance committees and online activities in relation to this major University change programme, providing the opportunity for representatives to give feedback on ideas as they emerged and developed. While some work streams were to be commended for the lengths they went to in engaging students in their work, other areas were more challenging and it was difficult at times to navigate the interdependencies between work streams and the assess the overall likely impact on students. Student representatives were also significantly constrained by strict confidentiality agreements which prevented information sharing and discussion on proposed changes. A number of Student Association representatives and staff met with some senior members of the University in December 2017 and again in February 2018 to discuss ways that student engagement could be more fully embedded in the Transformation and to improve ways of working between the Association and the University. Some wider student engagement events were planned and took place during the early spring of 2018. During this period, we also continued to raise concerns that the changes proposed would not do enough to address the low retention, success and completion rates at the University and could undermine the founding mission of the University.

A Support Coordinator joined the Students Association staff team in February 2018 as the Transformation Programme progressed, allowing us to have a dedicated resource to support representatives involved in the Programme, to coordinate student involvement and contributions and to manage programme related communications. When Mary Kellett was appointed as the University’s Acting Vice Chancellor in April 2018 she paused the Transformation Programme and commissioned a Critical Review in response to concerns raised by both students and staff. Student representatives were given the opportunity to contribute to the review through a number of different channels including surveys and focus groups, and representatives were actively involved in both gathering and analysing feedback from across all areas of the University and in the development of the final review recommendations.

We fully endorse the review recommendations as they do reflect the views and input of student representatives on how the University should now move forward, especially with regards to student involvement and the need for significantly greater partnership working between the University and the Students Association. We are waiting to see the management response to the review recommendations, which is expected in early autumn, in order to understand what changes are going to be made by the University and how the lessons learnt through the review will be used to plan for more effective and meaningful student engagement in the future. Student representatives have provided their recommendations to the Acting Vice Chancellor on how the review recommendations should be implemented to achieve greater partnership working.

Achievement: We were able to get written agreement from the University, as an addendum to the Relationship Agreement, on the removal of the confidentiality barriers that prevented meaningful representation.
Supporting our Reps

THE RESEARCH STRATEGY
The Research Strategy is being developed to ensure that our research work is timely, supports evidence led decision making within the Association, and explores the specific part-time distance learning experience of our members. It aims to set out a clear mechanism to prioritise research projects, engage student representatives and support academic representation, and raise awareness of research within the wider student community. The research strategy will also consolidate and take forward our student engagement initiatives. An example of this are two workshops held to gather student feedback on research topics, one with the student leadership team to get early feedback on the Volunteering Research Project in September 2017 and the other with the Central Committee Representatives as part of the CCR Seminar in April 2018.

Achievement: Initial scoping of the research strategy has taken place and a full draft will be presented to the October 2018 meeting of the student leadership team.

RECRUITMENT FOR REPRESENTATIVES
At the time of writing, we have over 50 student volunteers liaising and networking in forums with other students, gathering feedback and opinion for the Central Executive Committee, and acting in their representative’s capacity on Open University Academic Governance committees. As part of an increase in support for these Student Voice volunteers, the Students Association has developed new materials for their training, created a new suite of forums for them to easily build relationships and gain support from each other whilst in role, and is bringing their work closer aligned to the work of the Students Association Central Executive Committee. There has also been a review of the membership of Senate Reference Group as part of its Annual Effectiveness Review in 2017, and a new volunteer role has been created to diversify the group and perspective of the student members of Senate.

Achievement: A developed application process, which has brought in new volunteers to the team providing a good balance of both experienced and fresh voices.
Supporting our Reps

**VOLUNTEER RESEARCH**

The Volunteering Research Project has been undertaken to explore students’ motivations for volunteering with the Association, identify the benefits of volunteering as well as some of the barriers that students could face while volunteering, and perceptions around community based volunteering opportunities.

We found that the most common motivation for volunteering was ‘To help the student community’ (84%), with a similarly high response for ‘meeting new people and making friends’ (82%) when considering the benefits of volunteering. Feedback on the challenges faced by volunteers suggests a need to improve advice on time management, identify clear lines of communication between volunteer groups and the Association office, and provide more guidelines on how volunteer roles interact with each other and how volunteers can feed back to the student community. Volunteer perceptions of community-based volunteering suggest a need to clarify how students can get involved in such projects, what community based projects entail and how they would work in practice.

**WORKING WITH COMMITTEES**

The Education Policy Office and Representation Officer worked with Student Voice volunteers to devise a guidance document for Committee Secretaries. This document outlines best practise for working with student members, and will be helpful to both current and future secretaries, ensuring that, as far as possible, there is a consistent approach by committees in how they support and work with their student members, enabling student members to engage and integrate fully with the work of the committee.

This document was presented to secretaries at a series of drop-in sessions held in the Students Association office. The drop-in gave secretaries the opportunity to meet members of the Student Voice team and one another, which was positive as they were able to share their experiences of working with student members and draw inspiration from the good practise of others.

*Achievement: Producing new guidance and resources for the Committee Secretaries.*

*Achievement: The Volunteering Research Project has given key insights into the student experience of volunteering, which will inform how the Association introduces new opportunities and improves the support offered to student volunteers.*
Supporting our Reps

CENTRAL REP SEMINAR SUCCESS
With such a diverse and committed team of Central Committee Representatives it is increasingly important that relevant training is offered in a variety of ways. Regular online catch ups and bespoke resources in the Volunteer Zone area of the website are recent additions to the support we offer but the mainstay of training for Central Committee Representatives remains the annual training seminar.

In April 2018, we trialled a Friday/Saturday rather than a full weekend and removed the ‘appointments’ element which has previously been integral to the seminar. Incoming VP Education in discussion with the Head of Student Voice will decide whether this continues for subsequent seminars.

The seminar has three objectives:

- **To receive relevant updates from the OU.** In April the team of reps heard from the Governance team and from the Open Programme Director and had the opportunity to hear about the Transformation work in the OU and Association.

- **To practice the skills needed to be effective in committee meetings.** In April two mock meetings were held with experienced reps taking the chairs and the papers created deliberately to provoke good discussions.

- **To network and build strong relationships with other reps.** Most reps attend their OU committee meetings either alone or with only one other rep. The seminar is a great chance for reps in the same faculty or on similar committees to meet up and chat about common themes. It is also a chance for reps to feedback to one another any inconsistencies in OU support and processes.

*Achievement: Evaluation of the seminar suggests that all three objectives were achieved while enjoying a well organised and varied timetable of activities.*
Supporting our Reps

SENATE REFERENCE GROUP VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT
The membership of the OU Students Association Senate Reference Group agreed, as part of their Annual Effectiveness Review 2017, to have a membership category for eight Senate Reference Group Volunteers. This was a new opportunity to be advertised in the same way as other volunteers with the responsibility of deciding who was suitable for the role resting with the Appointments Committee. With the overall aim of Senate Reference Group ‘to act in an advisory capacity’ to the six student members of Senate, the specific aim of the new role was to seek the opinion of students who are not already engaged with the governance process through other roles, thus increasing the diversity of SRG membership.

The introduction of the role has made a good start with the members in that category making useful contributions to the meetings and forum spaces. Some have also become more involved in other Association activities, and have volunteered for new roles. We also produced our first Senate Reference Group video in which a mix of members including the new volunteer spoke positively about their experience.

Achievement - Due to this role's success, there will be an advertising campaign in August and September 2018 to recruit to any vacancies ready for the next SRG meeting in October 2018.

What else have we been done this year?

- Produced a 'Guide to Academic Representation' with video to accompany!
- Adjusted and developed the roles of Central Committee Representative and Learner Experience Representative with a clearly defined role description and an appropriate application process.
- Created and distributed staff press pack about Academic Representation and how they can help efforts to recruit student volunteers.
- Explored channels such as Adobe Connect to deliver training and networking sessions for our volunteers.
- Given the Appointments committee training before they commence to undertake appointment of any student voice volunteer, with a highlight given to 'unconscious bias'.
- Have given CCRs the option of signing up for one or two years; this can help students with the idea of 'giving it a go' or trying the role for a set period.
- Shared information with the wider student body and institution about what is happening across the OU through newsletters and articles on our website.
- Supported sending our students to conferences, events and even Parliament to speak on matters affecting students.
- Created a new section on oustudents.com Volunteer Zone, a one stop shop for all of the training resources for our dedicated volunteers.
External campaigns and consultations

WE ARE #OUSTEUDENTS

Working in collaboration with the OU’s Government and External Affairs team, the Students Association decided to think creatively when responding to government consultations in late 2017. The consultations reviewed the set up for the new Office for Students and how the Students Association and OU can work together to try to ensure that the part-time and distance learning student voice is on their agenda. A video response to the Office for Students was sent on 20 December to Nicola Dandridge, Office for Students CEO. This video has nearly been viewed over 400 times on YouTube, and has been viewed and retweeted by senior people at the OU, including the previous Vice Chancellor. A roundtable event was hosted by the Office for Students on the 23 January, which was attended by 12 students from around the UK and abroad. The students shared very impactful and meaningful stories with Nicola Dandridge about why they study part time and/or at distance.

Nicola was particularly interested in whether or not students were given any information about the OU’s model in terms of careers advice – and many said ‘no’. There was also a discussion about the Office for Students first piece of research on value for money. One OU student pointed out that any research conducted on whether or not students believe their degree offers value for money, must consider part time/distance model separately - otherwise the findings will no accurately reflect the monetary value (or not) of this particular provision. Nicola said she would take this on board, and the final report indicates that distance learners in particular have slightly different conceptions of what constitutes value for money, especially since the provision costs less than full-time education. However, the lack of physical interaction with support or facilities can pose issues when thinking about the value of a course. When considering the theme for our biennial Conference in 2018, the student led steering committee made the decision to use ‘We Are #OUniversity Students’ as the theme of Conference.

ASSOCIATION PROVIDES EVIDENCE ON PART TIME AND DISTANCE LEARNERS FOR NEW NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS REPORT

In April 2018, The National Union of Students published ‘Class dismissed: Getting in and getting on in further and higher education’, a report commissioned by their Poverty Commission. The Poverty Commission was established to investigate and address issues of class and poverty in post-16 education. The Students Association felt it was vital that the experiences of part-time and distance learners were represented when exploring solutions to issues of access and funding in higher education, so we submitted a response to their consultation. The report offers a number of recommendations, including a review of student support and funding, the reinstatement of grant funding, and better support for students entitled to benefits. We were particularly pleased to see a specific recommendation addressing the need to ensure greater access to part-time education.

With the ongoing review of post-18 education, we hope that this report and the evidence the Students Association and The Open University has contributed to it will positively impact future part-time and distance students, wherever they study.