ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION CONSULTATION

A big thank you to the students who took part in the Association’s online consultation about Academic Representation back in November 2017. Unfortunately, we were unable to respond to every item, however we have some headlines for you in the You Said – We Did section of this response.

If you would like a response to any of the other items that were covered in the consultation then we would be happy to give you one, so please keep up the dialogue with this particular piece of work.

Please take a look at the document by clicking here.

A VOICE ABOVE THE REST: Lorelei Leaver, Learner Experience Representative

A voice can express an idea, thought, feeling, an opinion or can act as an invisible presence to say, “I AM HERE.” It is the FORCE that gives meaning to emotions.

Two years ago, I never in my wildest imagination would envision myself as a Learner Experience Representative moving and interacting among my fellow students - trying to extract not only their experiences, but what changes they would like to see the OU make to enhance their learning journey. I act as a neuro transmitter to the central body to evaluate and act to bring about change if necessary.

Through student representation, students can speak in unison to bring about modifications within the OU domain. Students no longer suffer in silence but are given a chance to become vocal chords for action. It is true that the pen is mightier than the sword.

But, it is the STUDENT VOICE that draws that pen to write.
Recently, I got the opportunity to attend a Politics Economics, Development and Geography workshop on Campus in Milton Keynes. The aim of the visit was to suggest how to extend student engagement and discuss areas which will improve satisfaction and retention in the PEDG department. Prior to the workshop, I experienced every emotion that a person can have. Although excited to get to attend the workshop and visit the Campus, I did feel nervous. However, once I met the Head of Student Voice (Sam Harding), those nerves melted away. Although I have been an Open University student for nine years, I have never visited the Campus. I had assumed that it would be just one small, lonesome building. While I do not want to ruin the impressive stature of it, I will reveal a little information. It does have a very large car park. This shocked me because I believed the Campus would be the size of a bungalow. After finding the reception and meeting Sam, the time had come to attend the PEDG Workshop. I had arrived just in time for lunch, which granted the perfect opportunity to introduce myself. After a few introductions, it dawned on me that the people attending the workshop are the people who I consider the ‘bosses’. These are the distinguished people who teach us, who create our study materials, and make sure that the Open University exists. While having lunch, I engaged in general conversation with them. It astonished me that they showed interest in who I am and the views that I hold. This respect made me realise that they are genuinely interested in improving the students’ experience. Those initial nerves began to disintegrate and I felt prepared for the workshop. Being a Learner Experience Representative, I have the unique opportunity to speak to numerous students. I get to enjoy their praise for the University, while also relating to their problems. Having this outlook allowed me to share the views of both myself and others. I discussed the worries that students endure, their reasons for leaving and why students may not engage. The response from staff ranged from sadness to determination in improving the Open University experience. We spoke about methods of ensuring students remained with their studies and how to improve satisfaction. I sat in awe while listening to the ideas that Sam and the student representatives had formed in hopes of improving student engagement and retention. Even when the workshop concluded, staff approached me to ask about what they can do to help their students and other pertinent topics. My journey back home granted me the chance to reflect on the afternoon. The most important aspect I took away from the workshop is that the Open University and Association really does care about the students. While I did my undergraduate degree, I made the mistake of believing that the Open University did not care. This preconceived idea caused a lot of unnecessary problems, which unfortunately did have an impact on my degree. I now realise that the staff wants the students to excel and are willing to offer support. If you are a student who is struggling, please know that there is help available. Thank you to everyone involved in providing me with an unforgettable experience. This workshop has encouraged me to become more involved within the Open University. It has allowed me to see how influential the voice of a student can be. I also want to encourage other students to participate, so you get to experience the incredible opportunity that I had. The more students that get involved, the stronger the Open University will become. Together, we are more.
For me, the Central Committee Representative Seminar held at Kents Hill on 27-28th April, actually started a day after Teaching Committee meetings. Thursday evening was spent attending the PubPhd event in the OU bar - A fascinating evening, where I bumped into Nigel Paterson (a fellow Volunteer) at the event, and fun was had challenging and heckling OU PhD students.

The beginning of the Seminar on Friday morning is spent with a getting to know each other session. On my table is Paul Allatson, Rory Powell and Catherine Howell. I shared a table with Catherine at 2017 CCR Seminar and it was lovely to catch up with her. There was an insightful presentation from the Open University Governance Team telling us about the governance structure from Council down to Teaching Committees. The afternoon is spent in teams discussing mock committee papers before being sent into a mock committee meeting to discuss the differing position we have been asked to take. Sandra Summers chaired our mock meeting and I opted to ask some difficult questions of the chair. We finished off Friday with a moving speech from Patrick Johnson a newer representative to the team, with further briefings from Barbara Tarling about being on Council, and Sandra Summers about Quality Assurance.

Friday evening, I opt to take the motorbike down to a renowned bike café in North London, before re-joining everyone in the bar afterwards. Much of our social chat was occupied by events of late and the upcoming OU Student Association elections. Saturday, our table was joined by the Students Association President Nicci Simpson. There was group work thinking about the different way research can be utilised at the Association and the OU’s Peter Taylor gave a fantastic presentation about the OU Boards of Study. Later discussion was had about communications between CCR’s and Central Executive Committee, followed by reflections of the weekend and goodbyes.

It was great to meet new Central Committee Representatives, lovely to catch up with others, and sad to say goodbye to come as their OU journey comes to an end.

Have you signed up to oustudents.com? Remember to create an account as soon as possible to gain access to all of the great resources that we have for our volunteers!
SUMMER FIRST AID FOR OU STUDENTS:
Louise Randall, Central Committee Representative

Now that we are celebrating the end of our modules or maybe even the end of your study with Open University and you are looking forward to your graduation, I thought it would be good to share some basic First Aid tips to keep you and the ones you love safe throughout the summer break. If we are really lucky and we get enough sunshine, we all love to have a BBQ, but if you get carried away and manage to burn yourself, all you need to do is to put the burn under cold running water for at least 10 minutes or until the burn no longer hurts. If in your enthusiasm to create wonderful food for yourself and your guests you manage to cut or make yourself bleed, cover the wound with a clean, dry cloth – your old module books don’t count! – and apply some pressure.

For those of you lucky enough to graduate (keeping everything crossed it will be me next year) if your celebrations with your friends involve maybe a little tipple and your friends appear to pass out, all you need to do to keep them safe and remember the recovery position. If your celebrations are long lasting and you find your guests still out in your garden the following morning and you suspect they may be suffering, give them lots of layers to wear and a warm drink to warm them.

Have an excellent summer break, and celebrate all you have achieved

HAVE YOU TALKED TO YOUR TUTOR YET?
Emma Buckley, Central Committee Representative

When students are worried about things happening in their courses or have personal concerns, my first piece of advice is for them to talk to their tutor. It seems to be a common problem with students, myself included, that they appear foolish if they ask their tutors questions. I know the feeling. When I first started at the OU I didn’t want to ask my tutor anything. It was only because my mother, a former OU student herself, insisted that I emailed my tutor. What I discovered was that the tutors are very approachable, understanding and want you to succeed. I went from being uncertain of ask them anything to my tutors getting multiple emails a day asking about anything course related.

Here are some of the things I have learnt during my degree:
1. Your tutor is the first call for advice. If you keep them informed of what is happening, it is easier to ask for things.
2. There is no such thing as a stupid question. If you don’t understand, just ask. It’s better to ask and get the marks you want then to lose marks.

The biggest thing you have to remember is that your tutor wants you to succeed. It doesn’t matter what happens in your life, or how many questions you ask, if they can get you through the course they will. Your tutor is your ally, so call or email them if you have any concerns.
The Open University makes a huge difference in people’s lives - it can help everyone gain a degree no matter if you have a family, working, or are disabled - it offers everyone support. I’m a disabled student and the Open University has helped me with my journey. I started on 1st October 2014 and had a rough few years that followed, but had amazing support of my tutors which I’m eternally grateful to. I will be finishing my Ba/BSc (Open) Hons degree in May/June 2019. But my journey isn’t even over yet as I will be returning to start my master’s degree in October 2019. The Open University makes everyone’s dream come true. The support it offers is amazing, and I’m proud to say that I’ve studied with the Open University. It has helped me gain qualifications I never thought I would achieve, and doesn’t discriminate either. The OU takes everyone as a unique person and helps them to grow and succeed in whatever field they want to go into. I’m currently working my way into midwifery and nursing and also taking counselling on. I’ve enjoyed everything I’ve have learned and I would highly recommend the Open University if someone was to ask me. It does make a huge difference in everyone’s lives.

Thank you to the Student Voice Team for letting me have my voice heard, it’s been a pleasure seeing how you also help students. Volunteering with the Association as an LER has given me the confidence to be able to help make sure other students have their voice heard, as it is important for OU students to be heard. The Student Voice does an amazing job, in helping other students to see they are not alone when studying. There is always some out there willing to listen. Whether it to do with their studies or if they feel they are struggling in general they can turn to someone for the support. The Student Support Team in the Open University are so friendly to approach it makes people feel at ease and to know when you call them someone will be waiting to help on the other end. The Student Voice Team and Volunteers are doing an amazing job and I hope that all the new students who have started in February and ones starting in October will see that they will never be alone - as long as their voice can be represented. Student Voice does make a difference. We may not see changes straight away but by the end support really benefits students. I would also love to thank everyone who has pushed me in my very own journey. I had a brilliant first year in 2014, but 2015 I lost my Nan just before starting my second first level 1 - and also nearly lost my life due to getting very ill. But the Open University, Association and Student Support Team even after death of other family members in 2018.

I've still fought back to show I can, and will progress - so I wanted to use this opportunity to let others know although it’s hard, it is well and truly worth the journey. I’m hoping when people read about my own experience they will be able to approach the Student Voice and make their story heard. I’m hoping this will be seen by everyone at the Open University, the Association and by my tutors to show them how they have made a huge difference in my life and journey. So if you’re sitting there thinking I’d love to do some volunteering - then I’d say contact the Association they will be able to help. I hope you all enjoy reading this I’ve put all my effort into making sure it’s what I’d want people to read.

*Good luck with your own OU journeys, and luck to everyone starting exams and EMAs.*
CONFEREECE IS COMING!
Amy Ferguson, Conference Project Manager 2018

Our students are the reason we are all here so when it comes to conference, it’s really important that you get the opportunity to have your voice heard.
You could have this special opportunity to influence important decisions affecting the Association. There are plenty of ways to get involved in conference, however if you want the chance to vote from the comfort of your own home, you’ll need to register as a Digital Delegate by 8th June 2018. In addition to having your voice heard, you can chat and engage with other students online. You will also receive an exclusive goodie bag, access to special online content, games on our website and so much more! If you have some free time, head over to our dedicated conference website to start getting excited about conference and see how your vote could shape the future of the Association.

Sound good? Sign up here to the ballot today to become a Digital Delegate!

Central Rep Seminar: Nicky Hadjipanteli, Central Committee Representative

CCR Seminar! 27 to 28 April, stretched to the morning of the 29th! Too good a time to get away as soon as official business concluded. An occasion to meet new and old fellow volunteers, like-minded people who each have a personal reason for volunteering but that different reason brings them all together for a common purpose: volunteering for their fellow students, taking their issues forward if possible - and keep reminding them to the relevant university bodies.

The Seminar was useful to new and old alike and every year the office staff think of ways to get everyone out of their comfort zones, speak to people and in front of people. There was a presentation of the OU Governance so that we know the structure we have to fight against! There was also a presentation on Board of Studies, their position, role and absolute importance in the university structure. Such presentations give an insight of how things work and how issues are travelling through the university and where the volunteers meet them, sometimes repeatedly and sometimes not so often.

There was the usual committee skills session made more appealing with the controversial topics/papers to report from and from a certain point of view! The new qualification, Soap Opera BA, was a hit even if all the modules were compulsory! (no registrations please – fictitious qualification) In the Student led mini sessions fellow volunteer and new student Patrick took us through the start of his journey with the OU. He sounded adequately happy for a newbie both as a student and a CCR. Pooja from the office tried to inform us on OUSA led research and its worth, when Nigel questioning it (usual Nigel), he managed to produce helicopter taking off sounds with the microphone, making everyone relax at the prospect of having to chip in the research exercise. The office stressed the importance and the necessity of good communications between the various layers of student representation and how the lack of it could potentially harm or delay taking student issues forward. The weather was helpful too – cold, rainy and windy – which kept us indoors without complaining and focusing on the Seminar business that continued into the bar upstairs in the evenings.
As most of you will know, the University has embarked on an extensive change programme to address challenges around falling student numbers and low student retention, success and completion rates. You can read our comments about this Transformation Programme on our [website here](#).

More information on the Programme is also available on the University's Student Voice [website here](#).

Professor Mary Kellett was appointed as the University’s Acting Vice-Chancellor in April (read our statement on Mary’s appointment here). She is currently undertaking a critical review of the Transformation Programme, and as part of the review Mary is fully committed to working closely with the Association to ensure that student views are heard. Student representatives have been talking about their hopes and fears for the Transformation Programme and the future of the University – these are some of their thoughts.

I fear that we will push too far down the road for change without considering the impacts on students

I hope that student views will be considered

Almost half of the hopes and fears are related to WHAT the University will teach in the future and HOW it will be taught

I fear that students' interests aren't put first

Nearly a quarter of the hopes and fears are centred on the need for meaningful engagement and consultation with students and the role this will play in the success of the changes being made

I hope there are more up to date curriculum subjects that are relevant

I fear that the quality of modules will diminish

I hope we can develop a consensus view on the changes

I hope the University will keep face-to-face tutorials and day schools

I fear that everything will be online only
Student Representatives also have hopes and fears about the University remaining true to its core mission, maintaining its world-leading reputation and continuing to provide first class student support services. As part of our ongoing engagement with students, we will also be asking all delegates at this year’s Association conference to share their hopes and fears for the future of the University. Find out more about our conference here.

If you are unable to come along to conference, we would still love to hear from you. If you would like to share your hopes and fears about the changes that are underway at the University, please email your thoughts to student-voice-team@open.ac.uk or you can contribute in our student forum here.

Looking back I was a student invited to the very first Student Voice week in Milton Keynes. When I went there to engage in some workshops about modules and incorporating student feedback at more stages than we did then I never realised how big Student Voice would become. We now have teams of representatives covering all aspects of it. With the Learning Experience Reps and the Faculty Association Reps actively engaging in Student Voice every single day.

In my own role as an Area Rep for Northern Ireland I have seen first-hand how feeding back student experiences really does makes a difference. Also as the student representative on the National Student Survey Task Force I can see how much of a difference it makes to the university and the Students Association when we get enough input from students to make a difference.

We hit the 50% target responses that we needed to get the NSS results published which means we can use the data properly to make a difference. In Northern Ireland we have always had a great student satisfaction score from the students who respond to the NSS, with us getting it for the thirteenth year in a row last year. We look forward to continuing that satisfaction and looking to replicate it across the rest of the nations if we can.

One of the biggest issues we face with the National Student Survey is that it is primarily focused on full-time campus based universities. We then have to extrapolate those responses in light of us being a distance learning institution. We are always going to perform poorly on questions like face to face time with tutors, as our setup is based much more on online tutorials and face-to-face with tutors within clusters, so you may well go a whole module without ever meeting your own tutor.
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: Casey Ogden, Learner Experience Representative

It’s that time again, where we all rally around and decide who our next elected President, Vice President and all the other roles are going to be. One factor we should consider is that some of these candidates are women. This may not be a big deal in our society but compared with a hundred years ago it’s a big leap towards equality. Who do we aspire to help us motivate ourselves? Margaret Thatcher? Theresa May? Janet Street Porter or Princess Diana? Even the Queen. All are powerful women who have lead or are leading a group in a role of leader successfully. Another quality is respect. They have it from their followers and in return it is reciprocated. Compassion, sympathy, empathy, and all features any leader has, yet seem to have been given more whenever in this highly visible role. Is this true? It seems to be a normal thing to assume women rule by their heart and not their head. It is true women may have more empathy in times of war in the past i.e. knights and hostages, but this doesn’t mean they cannot rule with their head. To quote Blackadder’s Queen Elizabeth ‘I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a concrete elephant’. Sometimes we forget how fortunate women are that they can do this. The role of leader isn’t given to the highest bidder. It’ given to the person who has the right skills, who believes in themselves and asks for help from others. This is what all women have done, they have believed in themselves and it’s what they should continue to do. To strive to have those skills. I think that sum it up quite nicely don’t you.

(Good luck to all of you running in the elections!)

A COMMITTEE OF TEACHERS? Owen Cave, Central Committee Representative

There are lots of terms and acronyms flying around Student Voice. From BoS (Boards of Study), QAC, CuPC and AQGC to name a few (all governance committees). Another that crops up is ‘TC’ or Teaching Committee. But what are they? And, what’s it like be a Central Committee Representative on one?

Simply put, Teaching Committees are the funnel within the governance structure and the ‘gatekeeper’ of matters that go from faculty to institution wide committees. It receives reports and recommendations from the Boards of Study overseeing the academic matters of the faculty, and receives papers relating to governance matters within the faculty. TC’s meet four times a year and consider and approve matters on its agenda. It is effectively agreeing that the faculty is happy with a proposal or report and that such can leave the faculty and be subjected to scrutiny by the wider OU community. Once approved different agenda items go to different parts of the OU, from Student Experience, to Qualifications and Assessments to Curriculum Partnerships.

Being a rep on a Teaching Committee might seem a little daunting. Particularly as all the senior faculty staff will be attending, all the Associate Deans, Heads of School and Teaching Directors. It is humbling to successfully challenging proposals or action plans to the benefit of student. It is interesting to learn about curriculum partnerships operating around the globe. It is also insightful to participate in discussion items around various matters too. Overall, a truly rewarding experience.