In 2017, our student leadership team, Trustees and staff worked collectively to devise our strategic plan for the next three years through to 2020. The final strategy was approved by the Central Executive Committee and ratified by the Board of Trustees in July 2017.

Through the progression of the three core objectives contained within the strategy, we want to ensure that OU students get the most out of their time with The Open University and that their collective voice is heard and acted upon by the institution and by their Students Association. We aim to raise awareness of our services and achievements, provide a sense of belonging and connectedness and create a greater range of diverse opportunities for many more OU students than ever before. We also aim to be more effective at representing the OU student voice, not just within the University but in the wider external environment.

In essence, through delivery of this strategy we look forward to better representing the OU student voice and offering them a vibrant community with all the opportunities, guidance and support that we can, to make certain that they have the best possible experience. We believe that the student community and student voice are crucial aspects of what makes the OU a special organisation and we look forward to furthering the engagement and inclusion of all OU students in the transformation of this unique institution.

All of this couldn’t be achieved without the dedication of our numerous volunteers, as the Students Association is ultimately run by students, for students.
To encourage a vibrant and active student community with open access and equal opportunity, to which all OU students feel a sense of belonging and where they are able to positively influence the student experience and engage and support each other.

To be the voice of and community for all OU students.

OUR VISION

OUR MISSION
OUR VALUES

DEMOCRACY
Open, transparent and accessible democratic structures led by students improve our performance and strengthen our accountability to those we represent.

EQUALITY
We strive for equality for all in an inclusive and diverse community that values and respects difference.

INTEGRITY
We will stay true to our vision and uphold the founding mission of The Open University, maintaining an independent and fair representation of the student voice.

PARTNERSHIP
Proactive and responsive relationships built on mutual trust, respect and shared goals offer the best chance of achieving our aims.
LISTEN AND REPRESENT

ENGAGE AND SUPPORT

RAISE AWARENESS

OUR OBJECTIVES

Listen to OU students and represent their collective voice and academic interests.

Engage students in a vibrant and supportive community and create new opportunities.

Raise awareness of our actions and the impact of our work to enhance the student experience and student success.
**OUR AIMS ARE:**

1. To further develop and enhance our external profile and ability to influence government policy initiatives to support part-time and distance learning students.

2. To review how we can best represent a coherent and consistent voice of students at the highest levels of the University’s governance.

3. To ensure that the student voice is heard throughout the University, in keeping with the Student Charter and Relationship Agreement.

4. To ensure that all elected student representatives are offered high quality training to assist their development in the role.

5. To ensure that we offer the best possible representation of students.

6. To explore and further develop how we may best represent hard-to-reach groups and ensure that their voice is heard.

7. To improve the engagement of students with the Open University’s governing Council.

8. To further our approach to evidence-led decision making.

9. To listen to students and demonstrate that we understand and heed their voice.

10. To explore how we might seek to achieve individual representation of students rather than collective representation.
PROJECTS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

1. To review the external environment, our fit within it and how we might best seek to exert influence over policy in the wider context of the four UK nations. This may include:
   - Examining the work carried out by other charities.
   - Reviewing how we can support the work carried out by the OU’s nation offices.
   - Commissioning an externally-reviewed set of proposals for how we might foster our voice in the external arena.
   - Implementing changes, including potentially piloting some initiatives in one or more of the UK nations.
   - To consider the founding of an external advisory group, consisting of those willing to offer their advice/support to the OU Students Association.

2. To review, as part of the remits review, whether certain OU middle-tier governance committees would benefit from representation from one or more of our elected Officer team ex-officio.

3. To explore the feasibility of introducing a University-wide kitemark signalling that a project or programme has completed meaningful engagement with students.

4. To continue to develop and deliver a regular annual training programme for representatives.
   - To review the training for the 2016-18 representatives and make recommendations for enhancements in the future.
   - To develop an induction package for new starters following mid-term by-elections.

5. To work with University colleagues to develop a joint code of practice for academic representation, to seek to clarify the role of central committee representatives and further explore faculty-based representation.

   As part of this, to also work with University colleagues to ensure that future reviews of academic governance allow the opportunity for a wider engagement of students in academic representation, dealing with issues such as the Milton Keynes focus and committee meetings taking place in standard working hours.

6. To explore how we might best represent the interests of students in secure environments, BME students and research students. To try and tie this work into supporting these student communities as per actions under the engaged student community objective.

   This may include:
   - Inviting an external review of how we support students and what barriers are in place that are preventing effective representation (e.g. BME).
   - To develop ties with OU staff networks where appropriate.

7. To implement a number of initiatives including:
   - A regular invite for Council members to attend our annual dinner.
   - An invitation to attend our biennial Conference.

8. To continue to develop and deliver a regular annual training programme for representatives.
   - Identifying the key routes for research.
   - Making a clear distinction between student consultation, research and engagement activities.
   - Ensuring that research can support decision making in a timely and relevant manner.
   - Considering ways to maximise capacity.
   - Set out a clear mechanism to prioritise research projects.
   - To ensure that research supports representation.
   - Explore the instigation of a student research panel.
To define what we mean by individual representation, with reference to experiences in other Student Unions. Examples to be explored may include providing an advice service and representing students going through the University’s complaints or student disciplinary processes.

To set out clear positions on policy matters and ensure effective communication to our student members and to ensure that our research and representation work conveys the student voice.

To take other approaches, including:

- Piloting the use of StudentIdeas to raise ideas and initiatives for consideration by the Central Executive Committee, to allow students the opportunity to shape our agenda
- Encouraging the University to improve feedback to students and ensure that it demonstrates how it is listening and taking on board the student voice, for example the NSS
- To undertake a student-facing strategy review on a biennial basis, to ensure that the student voice is including in strategy setting.
- To seek to be sector-leading in hearing and acting upon the student voice

To define what we mean by individual representation, with reference to experiences in other Student Unions. Examples to be explored may include providing an advice service and representing students going through the University’s complaints or student disciplinary processes.
OU AIMS ARE:

1. To support the creation of specific student groups.

2. To enhance our understanding, representation and support of postgraduate research students (including full-time and part-time students and those based within Affiliated Research Centres).

3. To enhance our support for student volunteering.

4. To explore an alumni mentoring scheme for new or current students.

5. To celebrate the achievements of OU students and of those supporting them.

6. To foster a sector-leading culture of student engagement within the Open University.

7. To encourage student engagement with the OU Students Shop and explore new ways to increase the range of products on offer and the income generated.

8. To develop new means of student-to-student support.

9. To expand the focus of our regular live events.

10. To expand the Peer Support service.

11. To work with the University to develop a much improved community of learning within The Open University.

12. To develop our organisational culture to provide a welcoming, engaging and supportive environment for everyone with a positive, forward looking and professional image.

13. To provide online forums to support the student community.

14. To improve the recognition, reward and ongoing engagement of Honorary Life Members.

15. To improve our understanding and monitoring of equality, diversity and inclusion.
PROJECTS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

1. To explore what specific support groups are out there and identify gaps in order to be more explicit in setting out to support the creation of new groups, including potentially a BME student group and support for research students. Early actions may include:
   - To research the current picture of support and the gaps in provision.
   - To seek to put out a call for people interested in forming a BME group with a clear expression of the organisational support available to get this up and running.
   - To aim to build up groups supporting students under each of the University’s recognised protected characteristics.

2. To explore the needs of research students and develop a clear proposal on how they may be represented and supported by the OU Students Association. Early actions may include:
   - Running a social event to engage with research students, as an informal focus group and write up findings.
   - To review the training for the 2016-18 representatives and make recommendations for enhancements in the future.
   - To explore the inclusion of research students within future Student Voice weeks and at our biennial Conference.
   - Linking up with the Graduate School and Postgraduate Student Society.
   - To explore the feasibility and support amongst the OU research student community for initiatives such as regular gatherings, three minute thesis sessions and a potential link-up with the research student community at neighbouring Cranfield University.
   - To give due consideration to whether the OU Students Association is able to truly represent research students, particularly during Rules Revision in 2017/18.

3. To ensure that we are providing a high level of quality support and opportunities to volunteers. Actions will include:
   - To implement a new over-arching volunteer policy.
   - To review the support provided for elected representative roles, including the induction and handover processes, a formal induction checklist, training in role and exploration of an ‘outduction’.
   - To review and revise the volunteer code of conduct and produce supporting materials.
   - Examining through the remits review where support for volunteering may be incorporated into the remits of the Trustees and/or Central Executive Committee.
   - To seek to gain external accreditation for our work through the Investing in Volunteers quality standard.
   - To explore the feasibility of short term project-based volunteering and the linkage with the student engagement project.
   - To explore and trial partnerships to achieve community volunteering.

4. To work in partnership with the Careers and Employability Service to explore how we might pilot an alumni mentoring scheme for new students and to ensure suitable training and ongoing evaluation.
   - To explore whether this could potentially expand to shadowing.
   - To make links between this development and our affiliated Societies.

5. To look to reward achievements by students and by OU staff including:
   - To explore the feasibility of introducing student awards e.g. student of the year from each Faculty or outstanding contribution to student societies.
   - To explore student-led teaching awards, and other award schemes to recognise non-teaching members of OU staff.
   - To explore the tie-in with other award schemes.
   - To explore the feasibility of students designing the categories.
To work with OU staff to advocate for the power, potential and necessity of student engagement in line with the UK Quality Code. To call on the University to ensure that support for student consultation and engagement gains momentum and is given the appropriate level of executive support and financial resources to produce a culture which is at the forefront of the sector.

To ensure that the new OU Students Association website provides a clear link to the OU Students Shop website. To explore initiatives such as:

- Running regular seasonal marketing campaigns.
- Providing better links to student Societies and their products.
- Exploring new product ranges, e.g. Open University products.
- Running regular student design competitions.
- Finding new avenues of income to account for the future loss of exam paper sales, e.g. advertising
- Review the membership of the OU Students Shop Board.

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To explore instigating a more formal study buddies scheme.

9

To seek to work with Faculties to develop study skills and programme-level sessions online.

To seek to enhance the focus and participation in Facebook sessions.

To ensure that we are providing a high level of quality support and opportunities to volunteers. Actions will include:

- To review the application process, mentoring, training and support for Peer Supporters.
- To recruit more Peer Supporters, especially those with expertise in dealing with anxiety.
- To support the Peer Supporter community and ensure a steady growth with retention of a good team spirit.
- To increase the numbers of students accessing the service.

10

11

To support work to develop the academic community and work to ensure that this places students at the forefront of initiatives, including:

- To work with Faculties to develop study discipline focused events where OU staff and students can network, talk about their studies, engage with guest speakers, meet with the appropriate society, meet the academics developing their module materials, engage with employers and discipline-related bodies/professional organisations.
- To call on Faculties to provide a greater level of engagement and support for study-related societies.
- To seek to develop such events as part of our biennial Conference programme.

To undertake regular research projects, large and small, with our members to understand their needs.

To ensure that we dedicate our resources and time to focusing on what our members want from us and being proactive rather than spending the majority reacting to changes that the University is planning to make.

To implement an anti-bullying policy and supporting actions.

To develop and enhance a culture where our values of working in partnership are riveted throughout our approach to our work, developing an external-facing organisation.

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To support work to develop the academic community and work to ensure that this places students at the forefront of initiatives, including:

- To commission an external review of our culture and working practices, to result in a report of recommendations for change.
- To review and revitalise our student-staff protocols.
- To seek to create a one-team spirit.

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To review and revitalise our student-staff protocols.

To seek to create a one-team spirit.
To review and revitalise our focus on equality, diversity and inclusion to ensure that we lead the way in recognising and supporting our members across the organisation.

To review and revitalise our approach to monitoring equality, diversity and inclusion in staff recruitment.

To ensure that the anti-bullying policy and associated actions support the promotion of a diverse community.

To form an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reference group of the Chairs of each specific student group.

To build on recent work to continue to develop ways of involving Honorary Life Members in our work, including:

- Running further future surveys.
- Ensuring regular communications.
- Providing opportunities to Honorary Life Members who want to engage with or assist our ongoing work.
- Ensuring excellent coverage of the Honorary Life Members on our new website.
- Maintaining improved records of Honorary Life Members.
Raise awareness of our actions and the impact of our work to enhance the student experience and student success.

OUR AIMS ARE:

1. To change our vocabulary to be more inclusive and more meaningful to students. To consider changing the title of the Central Executive Committee and role titles as part of the forthcoming review of the Constitution and Remits and to consider changes to non-elected volunteer roles as necessary.

2. To refresh and re-vitalise our Communications Strategy to adopt new ideas and drive forward the raising of awareness of our actions and impact.

3. To improve our understanding of our members in order to enhance our actions and impact.

4. To produce an annual report of our impact.

5. To undertake a project to explore, understand and make recommendations to improve the understanding and awareness that new students have of the OU Students Association from the beginning of their student journey.

6. To improve the understanding amongst members of how the Students Association makes decisions and what happens at meetings of the Central Executive Committee.

7. To launch an awareness-raising campaign about the work of the Open University Students Educational Trust to increase the number of applications and the number of students supported.

8. To launch our new redesigned website.
PROJECTS, ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

1. Remits Review to consider role titles as well as role descriptions and to propose changes as relevant for the quadrennial review of the Constitution. Volunteer roles and titles to be reviewed. New structure diagrams and flowcharts produced for students as part of the new website.

2. Refreshed Communications Strategy agreed by Central Executive Committee and implemented. The strategy will consider the following suggested approaches:
   - Greater use of different media, including enhanced use of video with good quality transcription.
   - Focus on the social media profile and our key messages to re-balance the output to include details of policy achievements or other significant wins.

3. To explore the feasibility of introducing a University-wide kitemark signalling that a project or programme has completed meaningful engagement with students.
   - Linking up with OU departments including Marketing and the Strategy and Information Office to explore useful data or segmentation work that may be available to be used or to inform the approach.
   - Inviting an external review of how we support students and what barriers are in place that are preventing effective representation (e.g. BME).
   - To develop ties with OU staff networks where appropriate.
   - Exploring examples in other student unions and charities.
   - Clarifying key information that we want and what work it will seek to inform (e.g. communications, support, volunteering, voice).
   - Exploring external assistance or consultancy where appropriate and relevant.
   - Producing or commissioning the production of a segmentation report.
   - Exploring how to maintain this work into the future as student demographics change.

4. To produce and publish an engaging and uplifting report of our impact. This report should be concise and of the highest quality including imagery and visual presentations of statistics and other measures of impact and should also experiment with ways of supporting student-led demonstrations of our impact. This report, or versions of it, should be made available to all students, to the OU Council and as part of our annual accounts.

5. To explore when students first become aware of the OU Students Association and their student community and make recommendations for the improvement of this.
   - To work with the Open University to secure changes, including with the Faculties.
   - To secure an excellent coverage of the OU Students Association within the University’s induction project, including within any planned communications from Associate Lecturers and Module teams.
   - To seek to refresh and strengthen Freshers weeks for the future.
To undertake a number of small initiatives to improve access and openness for members to gain an insight into our work, including:

- To offer more students than ever before the opportunity to attend a meeting as an observer.
- To ask observers to produce a blog detailing their experiences.
- To trial live-tweeting on key topics/decisions made at meetings.
- To trial the opportunity of conducting small polls on social media to help inform discussion.
- To explore other ways of informing students and providing openness and transparency in decision making.
- To raise awareness of CEC members and their work at student meet-ups and student voice events.

6

To launch the new redesigned website and later to carry out a review following its first six months in operation.

8

To ask observers to produce a blog detailing their experiences.

To provide a clear path for accessibility-related feedback to be received and considered.

To work with other University departments to ensure that other channels are pointing towards our website including the Careers and Employability Service, Library and Module homepages.

To consider forming a standing review group to ensure that the website is continually promoted and enhanced.

To promote the work and opportunity of support offered to students by OU Students Educational Trust (OUSET) in order to increase the number of applications and the number of students supported. This will include the roll-out of the OUSET Ambassadors volunteer role. In addition, to look at maximising the capture of the impact made by OUSET through individual case studies.

7

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