

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (C E C)

STUDENT VOICE WEEK – 13th to 21st November 2021

The C E C is asked to:-

- i) **Receive** the report on Student Voice Week 2021
- ii) Provide **input** on the discussion topics outlined in Section 8

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The OU Students Association work in partnership with the OU's Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) through the OU's Student Voice Steering Group to deliver the Student Charter commitment to 'actively support student engagement in University decision-making, ensuring the feedback loop is closed; and commit to building partnership between staff and students.'
- 1.2 The OU's Student Voice Steering Group agreed a proposal for Student Voice Week 2021 at its January 2021 meeting as an outcome from the evaluation of Student Voice Week 2020 and as part of implementation of the 2020/21 Student Voice Action Plan and fulfilling its Term of Reference to promote 'a culture of listening to, acting on and reporting back on Student Voice amongst students and staff'.
- 1.3 An initial plan for Student Voice Week 2021 was agreed by the Student Voice Steering Group in April 2021, including:
 - a. the **aims and objectives**
 - b. the **organisational structure** comprising a Delivery Group – a team of colleagues from PVC (Students) and the OU Students Association – and a Planning Group, meeting less frequently but with wider OU stakeholder engagement.
 - c. the **schedule** of activity including key milestones.

2. Aims and Objectives of Student Voice Week

2.1 The over-arching aim of Student Voice Week was to enable students and staff to recognise and realise the value of Student Voice at the OU.

2.2 The Student Voice Steering Group agreed the following objectives for Student Voice Week 2021:

- a. To raise **student awareness** of Student Voice, including what it means, why it is valued, the opportunities there are to be involved and what benefits those opportunities can bring.
- b. To increase **staff awareness and knowledge** of Student Voice across the diverse staff community including what Student Voice is, why it is valued, how activities and approaches can be initiated and developed; with a focus on sharing good practice for meaningful and authentic student participation and developing and promoting the Student Voice website and Student Voice Hub.
- c. To generate **engagement** with Student Voice activities from a greater number and a greater diversity of students, in particular considering those students that are sometimes excluded or under-represented in standard SV activities, including Black and Minority Ethnic students, younger students, and Postgraduate Research students, by offering a well-planned mix of diverse, inclusive and accessible activities during the week.
- d. To encourage **innovation**, including new types of initiatives or methods for engaging students and considering areas of work where students have not previously been involved in quality enhancement.
- e. To have clear and visible **impact** on improving the student experience, through organising a series of activities where student input can and will lead to positive change, and this can be demonstrated by YSWDs, closing the feedback loop; and where staff are able to demonstrably improve their approach to Student Voice.

3. Planning, Programme Development and Communications

3.1 Delivery Group

Core organising for the event began in May 2021 when a Delivery Group was established to lead on the overall organisation of the week, including the planning of staff events and the development of a communications plan for both student and staff sessions. Membership of the Group included staff and students from the Students Association and colleagues from PVC (Students). The Delivery Group also facilitated and coordinated the meetings and activities

of the Planning Group. As the event date approached, the Delivery Group met more frequently with weekly meetings in the immediate event run-up.

3.2 Planning Group

The Planning Group met for the first time in June 2021 and subsequently in August, September, October and for a post-event evaluation meeting in December. Members of the planning group included key stakeholders from across the University. The expectation of members was to contribute to overall planning and to ensure appropriate engagement from their unit in planning activities to be included in the event programme. University units were given free rein to organise the activities they chose, with support and advice from the Student Voice team and the Students Association as required.

3.3 Student Facing Events

Drop-in sessions were held in July 2021 for OU staff, and in August 2021 for Association staff and representatives. These were organised to assist those colleagues wanting to contribute to the student-facing timetable/programme. The aim of the sessions was to provide guidance and suggestions regarding the activities and how best to approach them.

Session organisers were asked to submit the initial plans for their session in August via an MS Form. Full details were required by late September to best ensure the timetable would be ready to officially launch early to mid-October. Session organisers were given access to a shared document, enabling them to fill in their individual session(s) details, including a proposed time and date. A draft timetable was built and shared with both session organisers and planning group members. Session organisers were also kept up to date with regular emails, and were provided with support and guidance for key requirements such as setting up registration forms, technical support for meeting platforms and advice on data protection.

Session organisers were also encouraged to use the Student Voice toolkit on the Student Voice Hub as a resource for helping to plan their sessions.

3.4 Staff Facing Events

PVC (Students) planned and organised three events during the week that were aimed at OU staff. The events were spread across the week in response to the feedback received by staff that had attended previous years' events and offered different formats of delivery – a 'showcase', a workshop and a panel event. All staff were welcome to attend, from those wanted to learn more about Student Voice to those already actively engaged in Student Voice activities. Student representatives were also invited to attend to ensure students were engaged in any discussions. A decision was made not to attempt to replicate the Virtual

'Learn about Fair' held during Student Voice Week 2020 as although the quality of content was high, the engagement had been relatively low.

3.5 Communications

A comprehensive communications plan was developed at the outset by the Delivery Group and covered both student and staff facing activity. The plan was discussed and developed further by the Planning Group in August 2021. It utilised a diverse range of platforms and each activity was allocated an owner and a date for which the communication was to be published. Channels used included: OU Life; OU and Association websites; emails; StudentHome; TutorHome; OU and Association newsletters; and OU and Association social media accounts.

3.6 Programme

The total number of opportunities for students was around 80 of which around 10 were weeklong activities/forum and/or social media activities. Overall, the sessions were spread evenly across the week. The evening slots were well utilised, the weekends less so. This is approximately double the number of events organised in 2020 and with a much greater diversity of events.

4. Event Evaluation & Feedback – Student Facing Events

4.1 Registration and Session Attendance

Around 85 percent of the total sessions were advertised with a registration link. The majority of sessions were primarily advertised via promotion of the student-facing timetable. Events open to both staff and students were also advertised on a staff-facing timetable on the Student Voice Hub.

Registration numbers were not submitted by all session hosts, but for those submitted the top three student/staff facing events for registrations were:

- Green Entrepreneur Showcase - Open University in Scotland – 70 registrants
- Senior Team Q&A - PVC(Students) and Students Association) – 50 registrants
- OU Student Action for Refugees (OSTAR) – Students Association – 44 registrants

Attendee numbers were not submitted by all session hosts, but for those submitted the top three student/staff facing events for attendees were:

- Senior Team Q&A - PVC(Students) and Students Association) – 34 attendees
- Green Entrepreneur Showcase - Open University in Scotland – 17 attendees
- OU Student Action for Refugees (OSTAR) – Students Association – 15 attendees

Unfortunately, registration and attendance numbers were only submitted for around half of the sessions. For these sessions:

- Total number of students registering – 568
- Total number of students attending - 255
- Average number of students registering for events - 18
- Average number of students attending sessions – 8

While there is a lot of data missing, extrapolating from the figures available would suggest that it appears that we are likely to have engaged approximately the same overall number of students as during Student Voice Week 2020. Attendance was, however, spread over a much larger programme – almost twice the number of individual sessions as in 2020 – reflected in the lower average registrants and attendees.

4.2 Results from the Student Feedback Survey

50 students completed the 2021 feedback survey, around half the number of the 2020 survey.

When asked if they felt the OU values students' views and opinions, and working with students to improve the student experience, 60% of responders selected 'Strongly Agree' and the remaining 40% selected 'Agree'.

When asked if they are likely to get involved in Student Voice activities in the future, 90% of responders selected 'Yes' and the remaining 10% selected 'Maybe'.

Overall, students rated the individual sessions they attended highly, with most scoring four or five out of five.

Below are some quotes taken from the qualitative student feedback:

"I have only just joined the OU and my first module does not start until Feb 2022. I wanted to attend to find out more about the OU and understand the requirements of me as an individual and of course to interact and meet with other students. This session has been very informative, and it has been great to highlight more details about certain webinars that I will be attending over the course of the week."

"Have enjoyed this evening's session and felt a big part of things"

"Student Voice week is a great idea to start to meet students and chat about our experiences at OU."

"Very enjoyable and informative. The presenters were lovely, informed, approachable and good at putting you at ease. Overall, a very good session and has definitely encouraged me to attend more in the future."

"There was a great deal of new ideas especially concerning TMA-extension as well as looking ahead into further studies. I would recommend attending these to all OU students."

“I think it is a great opportunity for students to be able to engage with senior members of the University and the Faculty”

4.3 Results from the Organisers Feedback Survey

21 session organisers completed the feedback survey.

Organiser satisfaction was lower than for student attendees, with around a third of organisers dissatisfied with the experience of organising an event/activity and over half dissatisfied with how their event/activity went on the day.

Organisers were asked to rate different aspects of event, including: information, advice and guidance; communications and promotion; support for organisers; attendance; and programming. The highest rated aspects were the overall programme and the support, information, advice and guidance for organisers. The lowest rated aspects were attendance and communications/promotion.

When asked what they felt might be the reason for student attendance numbers being lower than hoped/planned for, the largest rated reasons were difficulty in engaging students and too many sessions during the event.

Below are some quotes taken from the organiser responses when asked to suggest ways in which Student Voice Week could be improved:

“I think that Student Voice Week is seen by both staff and students as ‘something extra’. When viewed this way, it is easy to de-prioritise it. It would be interesting to frame it more as ‘we NEED your views’ rather than ‘this is your chance to have your say’”.

“We need to advertise more and probably get the students involved in planning events!”

“Simpler communications with all concerned, simpler registration process”

“On reflection I think perhaps the programme was too overwhelming for students. Primarily I think it was just too much crammed in too little time, so was intimidating and students weren't able to properly engage.”

“I think there were issues of accessibility of platforms used, timing in the year and I also wondered about the topics chosen.”

“A checklist would be helpful in planning the technical side of the events like setting up your registration form, sending meeting invites/URLs from Teams or Adobe, ensuring accessibility, offering alternative avenues to contribute for those who can't make the in-person event.”

“A student voice week reference group made up of students that are involved in planning for a longer period of time.”

“Perhaps more targeted invitations to students to engage in particular activities which appeal rather than generic or too many activities which may overwhelm them.”

“More of a focussed/themed approach with fewer events overall. Heavier comms and more amplification across all OU/Association channels. Centralisation of reg/admin process.”

“Earlier call for contributions. Clarity on marketing. Examples of successful events/sessions and what students want.”

5. Event Evaluation & Feedback – Staff Events

5.1 Registration and Session Attendance

Attendance for the three centrally organised staff events was as follows:

Session Title	Registered	Attendance
Student Voice Showcase	37	35
Engaging students as partners	21	29
A partnership approach - panel session	18	18
Total	76	82

This compares to 136 registered and 108 attending staff sessions in 2020.

5.2 Feedback from Staff Attendees

“I've never really engaged in the past because I didn't really understand it. But recently, I've had some nudges through different comms (such as surveys which allow me to consider that if I don't engage, then I'll never understand). So, that's what motivated me. It's like anything, you build trust and relationships incrementally, so attending the first two sessions allowed me to gain a bit of confidence to attend and engage with more. I'm beginning to feel supportive of the endeavours, where before, I wasn't really very interested”.

“A very informative session, great to see so many examples and welcome overlaps because it shows that our SV activity is joined up rather than existing in isolation!”

“Very informative session, good to know of all the wonderful work taking place across the University”.

6. Communications Evaluation – Key Channels

6.1 Website

Website programme page views were double the levels in 2020.

Student Voice Website	2021	2020
Page views	5,422	2,809
Unique page views	3,371	2,264

6.2 Social Media

There was a total of 24 posts about Student Voice Week across the central OU social media channels between 23 September and 18 November. The content posted or reshared on the OU’s central social media channels generated low engagement.

During Student Voice Week itself, there were five posts across the OU social media channels. These posts were all reshares of other content such as from the Student President and Students Association.

Students Association social media showed a 50% in both Twitter impressions and Facebook reach compared to 2020, with Twitter delivering higher engagement levels than Facebook.

6.3 OU Newsletters

The OU and You student newsletter sent out on 11 November to all OU students was themed around Student Voice Week with Student Voice Week in the subject line for the main UK edition, and tested with an alternative subject line in the Welsh edition. In the UK edition, open rates were significantly lower than average (29% average unique opens, compared to 78% for the previous edition and 56% overall average). The reduction in open rates on a single edition could indicate the subject line and subject of Student Voice Week was less appealing to our students. However, this drop in open rates is being investigated further as the newsletter was also issued for the first time from a

new platform and there may have been other technical factors impacting on this.

7. Evaluation Against Event Objectives

<p>Objective 1</p> <p>To raise student awareness of Student Voice, including what it means, why it is valued, the opportunities there are to be involved and what benefits those opportunities can bring.</p>	<p>The reach of the communications undertaken as outlined above demonstrate that thousands of students will have been reached by news of 'Student Voice Week'. Wider student and staff awareness and appreciation of Student Voice will be measured through surveys taking place in 2022 not yet available.</p>
<p>Objective 2</p> <p>To generate engagement with Student Voice activities from a greater number and a greater diversity of students, in particular considering those students that are sometimes excluded or under-represented in standard Student Voice activities, including Black and Minority Ethnic students, younger students, and Postgraduate Research students, by offering a well-planned mix of diverse, inclusive and accessible activities during the week.</p>	<p>The mix of diverse, inclusive and accessible activities was achieved including several focussed on equality, diversity and inclusion or related topics, however the data available about students registering or attending activities was insufficient to analyse the diversity of students engaged.</p>
<p>Objective 3</p> <p>To increase staff awareness and knowledge of Student Voice across the diverse staff community including what Student Voice is, why it is valued, how activities and approaches can be initiated and developed; with a focus on sharing good</p>	<p>Anecdotal feedback is that the staff events were well received and staff learned from them, however the poor take-up of the staff survey means this can't be more quantitatively evidenced. Increased visits to the Student Voice Hub also indicate this objective was achieved, but further data will be</p>

practice for meaningful and authentic student participation and developing and promoting the Student Voice website and Student Voice Hub.	available from the annual staff survey of Student Voice in spring/summer.
<p>Objective 4</p> <p>To encourage innovation, including new types of initiatives or methods for engaging students and considering areas of work where students have not previously been involved in quality enhancement.</p>	<p>New forms of engagement were piloted during Student Voice Week, but because of the overall student numbers, it is difficult to evaluate their success. Nevertheless, the opportunity was taken to encourage staff to think about how they engage with students</p>
<p>Objective 5</p> <p>To have clear and visible impact on improving the student experience, through organising a series of activities where student input can and will lead to positive change, and this can be demonstrated by “You Said We Did”, closing the feedback loop; and where staff are able to demonstrably improve their approach to Student Voice.</p>	<p>Once again, low numbers engaging with activities make this difficult to evaluate, however there will be further work to discover what changes, if any, were made as a result of activities during Student Voice Week and to ensure these are reported back to students.</p>

8. Discussion Areas

We would like to obtain input and feedback from the Central Executive Committee on the following three discussion topics:

- a. Ways to raise awareness amongst students of OU Student Voice activities and Student Voice Week, and to increase student participation in these activities and events. In particular, any suggestions for ways that we could improve communications and promotional activities.
- b. The make-up of future programmes. In particular, any feedback on the size of the programme (i.e. the number of sessions and the duration of the event) and the types of sessions.

- c. The extent to which Student Voice Week is a suitable or appropriate mechanic to deliver the Student Voice objectives detailed in Section 2.2, or whether there may be alternative or better ways to meet these objectives.

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