

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION**Central Executive Committee (CEC)**

22 – 24 April 2022

CLUBS REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **Approve** the recommendations put forward in this report.
- ii) **Comment** on any of the recommendations.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report includes recommendations for ways to improve clubs, covering: support, engagement, regulation, safeguarding and inclusion, and protected characteristics. Given the research we have conducted on clubs, it shows that clubs are already performing very well. The main area currently lacking is the awareness from club leads about the services available to them, as well as the club members lack of awareness about safeguarding and wellbeing services. Through increased levels of communication, additional training and appropriate signposting, it is thought that this will greatly improve the overall club experience.

1.2 VP Community (Anca Seaton) has been involved throughout, and student club leads and members views have been sought.

2. Introduction/Background

2.1 The concept of Clubs was initiated in 2018 as a lighter touch alternative to Societies, creating a format where students with similar interests could connect without the administrative burden imposed on Societies. Clubs exist on-line, usually on social media and the initial requirements are that they:

- Have 5 student members
- Have a 2 named club leads (current students)
- Are run for the benefit of OU students and are open and accessible to all
- Connect with the Association at least once a year to update any administrative details.

Clubs have been a great success and have been the springboard for three new Societies during the last three years – in addition they have provided a way for struggling societies to maintain their link with the Association and their members.

2.2 Anca was the key driver for this club review as clubs have not been reviewed since they first started in 2018. Clubs have grown exponentially since 2018, with 88 active clubs registered with the Association at present, with more than a total of 14,000 members. And even though these are the current total members logged on our database, the total of club members in real time may be in excess of this, because of the ever changing nature of club activity. 23 of these clubs alone were set up over the course of 2021. This shows that interest in clubs remain high amongst students. This club review is an opportunity to have better, stronger ties with clubs, to have a better line of communication with them, and to make them aware of what exactly our support services are and how we can help them. In regard to club members, we wanted to get an idea of what the club experience is like for them and find ways in which we can improve that student experience. For reference of the current club guidelines, please see Appendix 1.

2.3 The club review project began with background research before holding a focus group with a handful of club leads that ranged in: longevity of the club; the purpose of the club (type of hobby/interest/academic area); the number of social platforms they used; the number of members, and whether they have been previously nominated for Club of the Month. This was a very successful focus group which gave a lot of insight with many suggestions that we incorporated into our recommendations.

2.4 Two separate surveys were created, so that it would help give two different perspectives of the club: one from the club member side and the other from a club lead/second lead/admin perspective. Similar to the focus group, this also proved very fruitful, with more suggestions being incorporated into the recommendations.

2.5 It is important to mention that the response rates on these surveys were relatively low, resulting in only 13 responses for either survey. Therefore, to substantiate the findings from the survey, we also used our OU Students Association Annual Membership Survey (AMS) report 2021 (paper 04/22/12)

2.6 The last area we explored for ideas was speaking with Association staff members with alternative Student Union backgrounds to gather views on how clubs are run and administered in a Redbrick University. All of these efforts combined, helped to determine the concluding recommendations for this review that will be key in improving our support for clubs.

3. Findings from the research

3.1 Some key figures for the OU Students Association from the 2022 Club review survey:

- Facebook is by far the most commonly used platform, for all purposes of communication. This includes: getting new members, members feeling a sense of community, informing members of events and raising awareness of the club. 31% of club leads respond with sometimes using Discord, making Discord the second most commonly used platform. Similar findings were found in the Annual Membership Survey. Particularly with Discord, there were overwhelming amounts of positive comments out of the AMS.
- OU forums are not utilised well at all. They are the only platform that people checked 'we have an account but don't use it'. Please see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below as reference.

Figure 1.1- image of the collated results from the club lead survey in the form of a graph, relating to social media platforms.

5. Thinking about your club community do you use any of the following
[More Details](#)

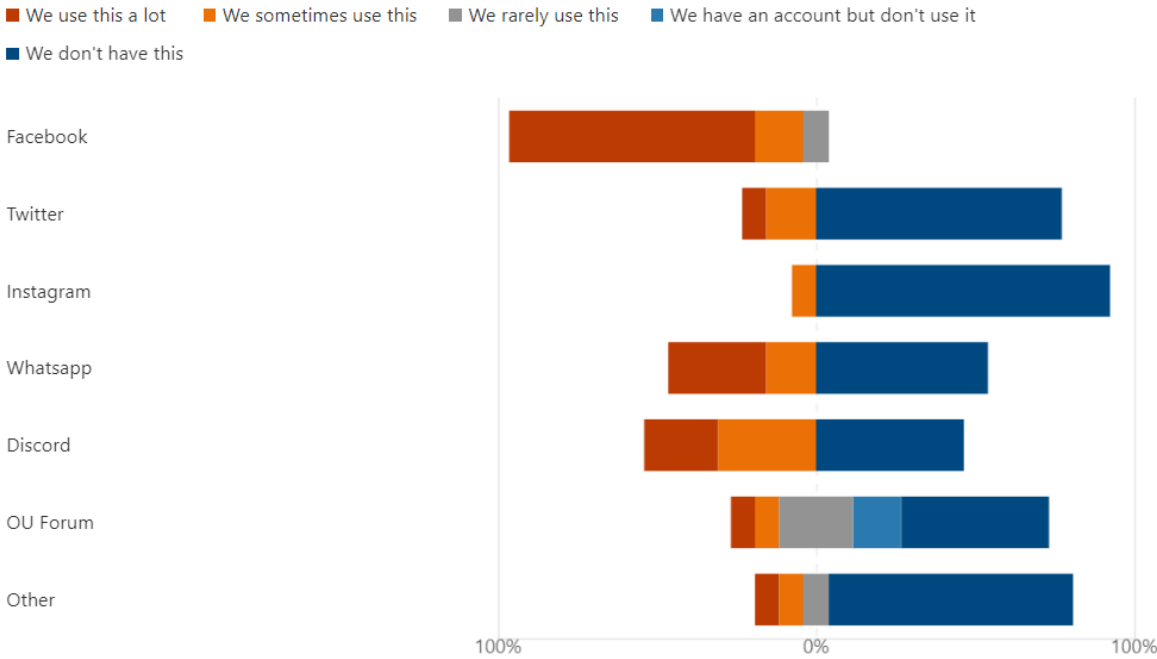
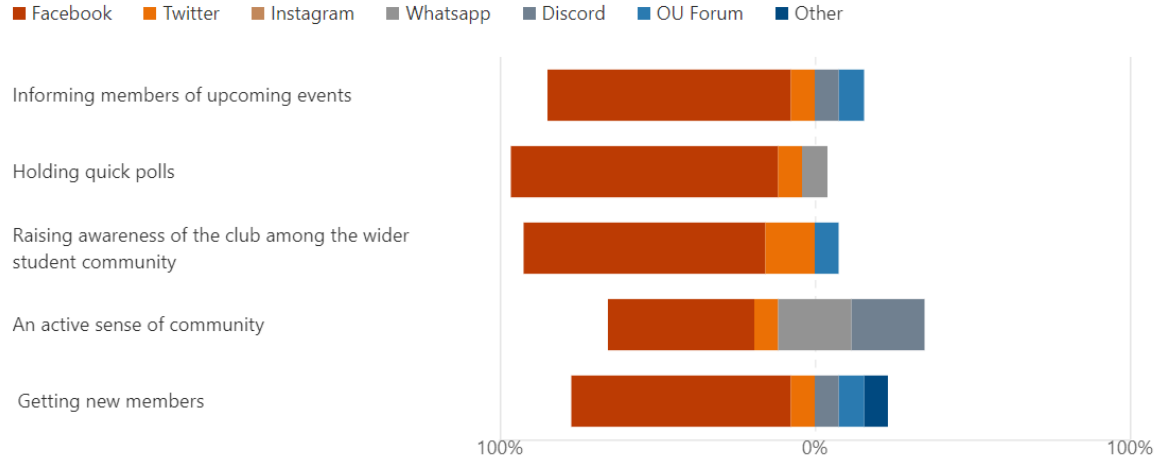


Figure 1.2- image of the collated results from the club lead survey in the form of a graph, relating to social media platforms.

6. Out of the forum and social media channels, please can you select which one is best suited for the following purposes
[More Details](#)



- Only 2 out of 13 respondents in the club lead survey said yes to experiencing or witnessing some form of misconduct. One of which later commented "In the Discord server, we had issues with a member in the beginning, who would send unsolicited private messages to members that made them very uncomfortable but it was dealt with quickly, our rules were amended across all our platforms, and it hasn't happened again". This shows that generally

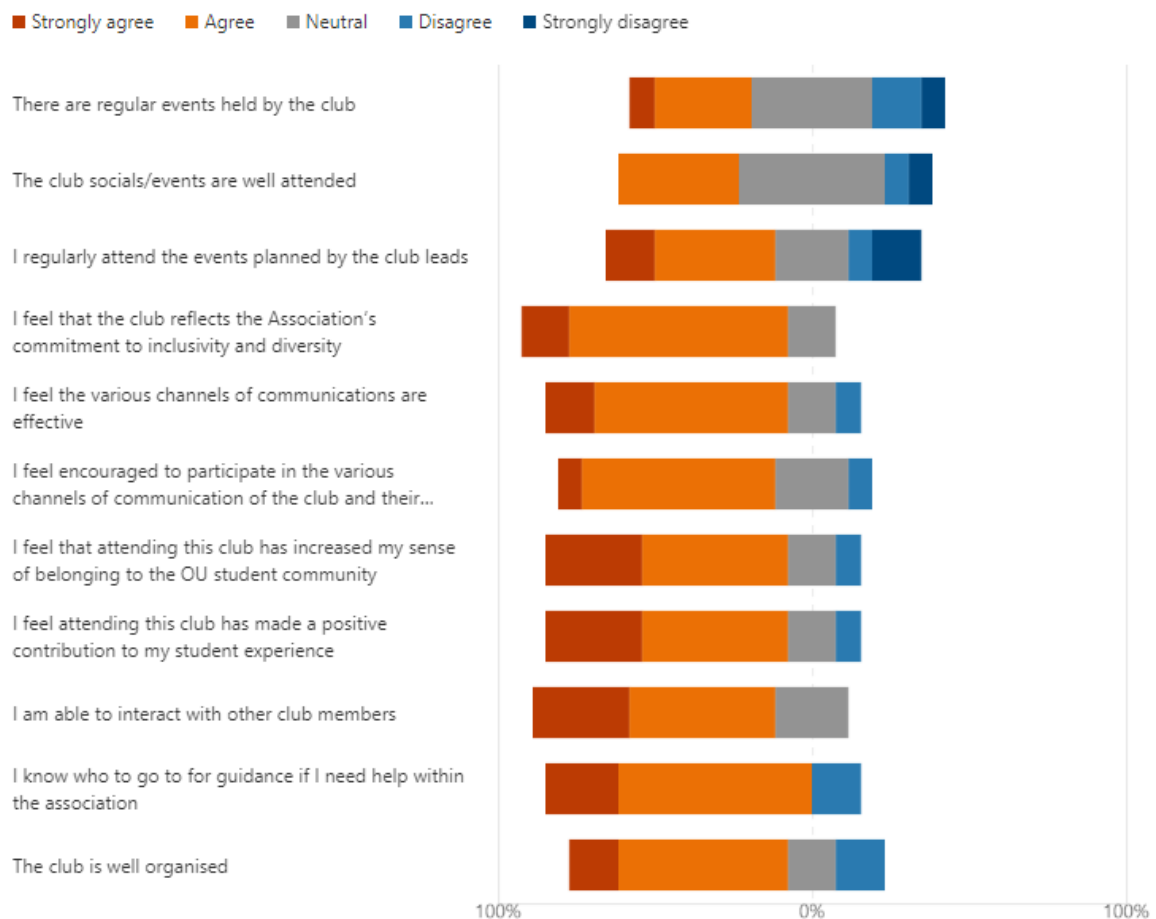
speaking, clubs are functioning remarkably well, with incidents getting resolved tactfully and effectively.

- Similar findings were found with the club members survey and the club leads survey, relating to: club member engagement; being inclusive and diverse; having a sense of belonging; and knowing who to go to when they need help/guidance. The results showed that more respondents in the club members survey selected disagree or strongly disagree in the statements shown in Figure 1.3. However the majority of the responses are leaning more positively to agreeing with the statements. Although in hind sight, if this survey was to be reproduced, we would consider to include an N/A option in the question in Figure 1.3 below, since some of the statement are not applicable to certain clubs. For example, there are clubs that are not event-orientated, so it would not be applicable for them to include an opinion in the first statement.

Figure 1.3 - image of the collated results from the club member survey in the form of a graph, relating to statements on the club and their membership.

6. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your club(s):

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- When asking the club members how successful the various facets of (online) meet ups have been, there were a lot of responses with N/A- see Figure 1.4 below for reference. This was initially a bit alarming, but if the N/A responses were to be removed, the majority of responses were towards the upper end of the scale provided. This implies that the overall success of meet ups were

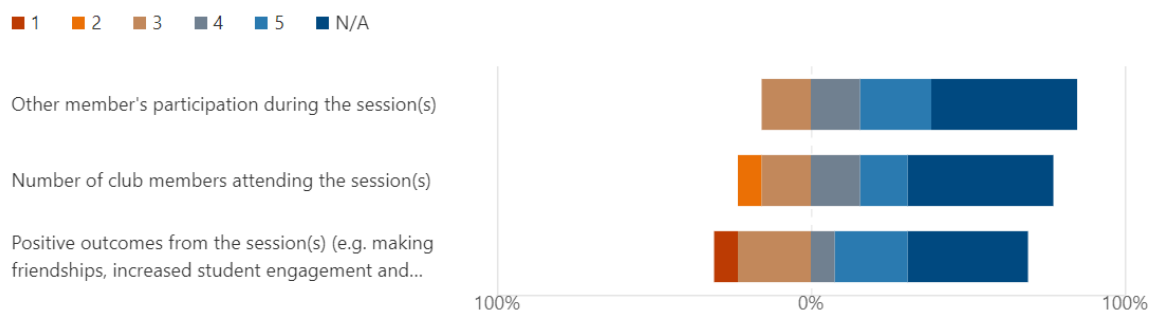
fairly high, which is also substantiated by club lead responses. 38.5% of club leads said there were successful participation from other club members in online meet up sessions. And 30.8% of club leads rated a 5 with their meet up in terms of positive outcomes coming from it.

- It must be mentioned however that equally 30.8% of club leads said that the number of people joining these sessions was not as successful. A direct quote from one of the club leads regarding this stated that they have noticed how even though there are 100 members of their club, only about 6-8 of them are active. When looking at the AMS results, they show similar levels with students taking part in Association activities when comparing to the 2020 AMS findings. This simply highlights that increased engagement to the club members will be a key determinant to improving the state of clubs.
- In fact, having increased engagement was a strong response from both surveys and Club leads recognised that there should be more regular meetings.
- Club members believe that there should be more events and more direct engagement from the club leads and admins, with a suggestion of having more than 1 person leading the event. One quote from a club member said: "the club is a good group of people it would be nice if it was more active".
- It's very clear there is appetite to increase activity in clubs, but they might just need a bit of support and guidance as to how to go about that. The survey truly showed that club leads are eager to build and develop their club: "I plan to ask members if anyone is interested in becoming admin and having meetings with a view to increasing activity for members".
- This links in with a lot of club lead respondents stating that the Association should have more frequent communication with the clubs. All this evidence combined implies that club leads want to improve the experience club members have, but that they need further direction from the Association as to how to administer this.

Figure 1.4- image of the collated results from the club member survey in the form of a graph, relating to statements of the success of (online) meet ups.

9. How successful do you find the online meet-ups or events generally are? On a scale of 1-5, 1 being not successful at all and 5 being very successful, please select your answer for each row!

[More Details](#)



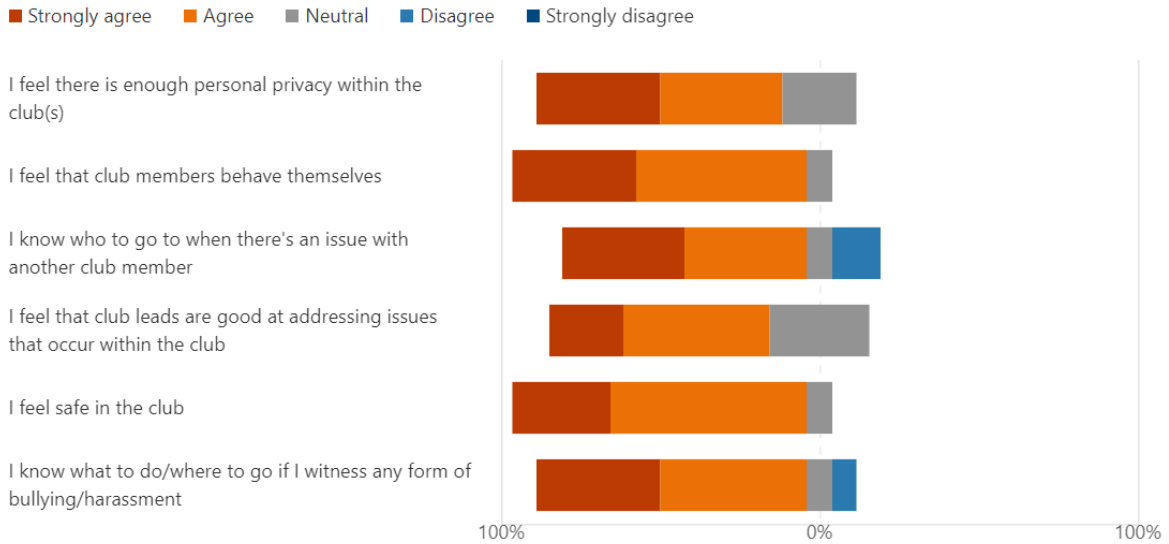
- From looking at Figure 1.5 below, it shows that club members strongly agreed or agreed with statements relating to code of conduct and safeguarding issues. There were even higher numbers of respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing to the statements in Figure 1.5 in the club lead survey. The only areas that a disagree was put was with statements regarding where to go

for help when they are faced with an issue with another club member or if they are facing any harassment/bullying.

Figure 1.5- image of the collated results from the club member survey in the form of a graph, relating to statements on safety, safeguarding and harassment within the club.

10. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your club(s):

[More Details](#)

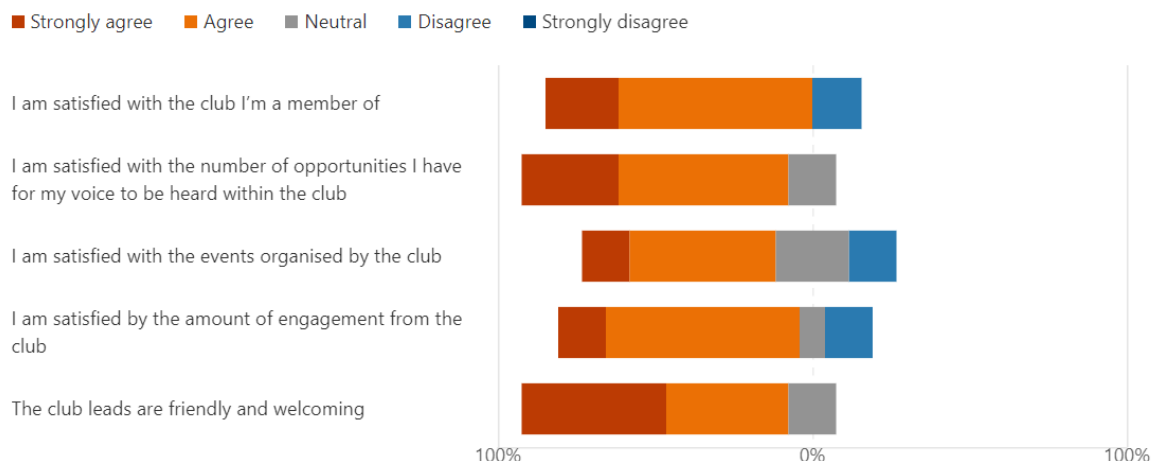


- The majority of club leads, second leads, and admins who took the survey believe there should be 3 admins within the club.
- Figure 1.6 shows even more positive signs about clubs. Very few club member respondents checked disagree with statements relating to feeling heard and being in a friendly and welcoming environment. In fact, no one responded with strongly disagree on the statements. The results out of the AMS showed similar results, as positive responses regarding equality and inclusivity increased by 3% between 2020 and 2021.

Figure 1.6- image of the collated results from the club member survey in the form of a graph, relating to statements on feeling heard, and being in a friendly and welcoming environment.

11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your club(s):

[More Details](#)

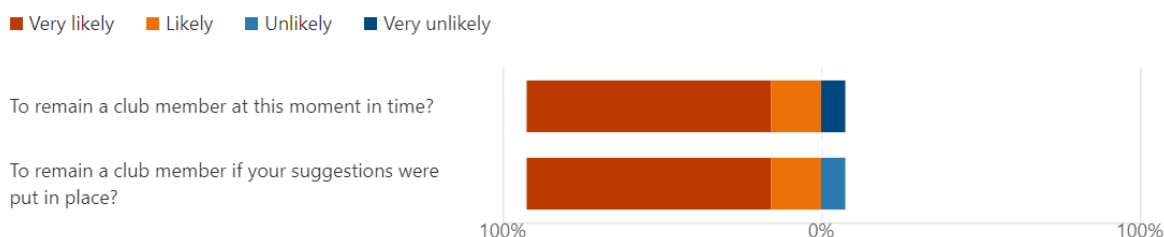


- Lastly, when asking the club members how likely they are to remain a club member right now versus once we improve the guidance and support; the majority stayed the same, if not improved, for example changing from likely to very likely. This goes to show that clubs are operating very well across the board, but simply need a bit more support and signposting from the Association. It also suggests that making these changes could encourage some people who are not involved to get involved, since there was a positive trend in the response.

Figure 1.7- image of the collated results from the club member survey in the form of a graph, relating to the likelihood of the club member staying with their affiliated club before and after implementing our recommendations.

15. How likely are you...

[More Details](#)



4. Proposed recommendations

4.1 Support

Before introducing the proposed recommendations in this section, it is important to highlight some key quotes extracted from club leads in the survey: "I know I can get in touch with the Association regarding any issues might happen with any of the clubs"; "I feel the Association and OU work very hard to ensure that there are direct and informative lines of enquiry for any issues. I feel very well supported as Club Lead and as a student volunteer." We also received feedback that club leads find the Association's social media platforms work very well for the promotional leads of

clubs. A lot of club leads already feel supported, so it is a matter of broadening that to all.

Below are the proposed recommendations to improve the way the Association supports clubs:

- **Compile a starter pack of useful templates, links, hints and tips.** This will make them feel more supported in what first steps to take and how exactly to do that. Most club leads/second leads and admins said they've been in the position for less than 6 months, which could imply that the club leads/second leads/admins become less engaged with us the longer they're in that club for. This statement also applied with club members. That is precisely why it is imperative to establish a good line of communication from the start.
- **Increased our promotion of their clubs on our social media channels and our online magazine the Hoot.** We have noticed that many club leads are not aware of what we can offer to them, and this is something easy and simple that could have a big impact on the success of the club and their events.
- **Provide more training opportunities to club leads and admins.**
- **Introduce a club newsletter, or potentially an additional feature of the volunteering newsletter.** Getting clubs more engaged with us and telling us more regularly what they've been up to, would be a great way to showcase it in a regular newsletter. This will have multiple benefits, but more generally, the club will feel supported and heard by the Association, through this promotion and recognition of their efforts.
- **Create a club lead chat group.** The focus group, expressed interest in having a chat platform, possibly in the form of a Slack channel or a Facebook group. This would be for discussion between club leads to share anything they have been working on or ask any questions/take suggestions from other club leads. This will be a great opportunity for clubs to branch out and share best practise with other club leads, which could further motivate them to sustain activity within their club.

4.2 Engagement

There were an overwhelming number of comments from the club lead survey that showed there was a strong sense of community with a friendly environment and strong peer support within clubs. A club member said: "The hosts are very approachable, they are knowledgeable about OU matters and can always direct to the solution for problems, conversations are always light hearted and everyone is made to feel very welcome." However as discussed earlier, club members would like clubs to be more active and to have more frequent meet ups. Although the survey suggests that club members are struggling in how to go about that: "What works well is that there is a sense of community, the majority of students want to meet each other and talk. Now how to promote and create events is something difficult".

Below are the proposed recommendations we have for ways to improve the way the Association engages with clubs as well as the way club leads engage with club members:

- **Introduce an annual meet up of the club leads.** These meetings could prove fruitful to reinforce certain recommendations we have for clubs and to share their updates, as well as an opportunity to meet other club leads and seconds. We could advise clubs to hold regular meetings themselves within their club or conduct regular surveys, in order to see how their club is performing. It would also give an opportunity to let the Student Community

team know about any changes that have happened within the club, such as a change of email address, a change of club lead and so on.

- **Encourage club leads to hold more frequent socials.** The survey suggested these would ideally be between once a month and once every 6 weeks.
- **Utilise the website to maximise the benefits of these changes.** An example would be to have a page that includes this starter pack for clubs as aforementioned on the website, so that it can always be retrieved by the club when needed.
- **Create a welcome video for new club members when they join.** This would be a great way of creating that warmth and excitement for new members, as well as useful for outlining what is expected from them as well as what they can expect from us. This would also be another way to spread the awareness of how we can support the club member or lead.

4.3 Regulation

Something that came out rather strongly from the research is to amend the regulations around clubs.

Below are the proposed recommendations we have for ways to formalise the regulation around clubs:

- **Have a compulsory named second club lead at the application stage.**
- **Complete an annual check of Personal Identifier numbers to check club leads are still members of the Association.**
- **Require leads to hold a separately created club email, as opposed to having a personal email for the mode of contact.** It will let other members of the club access and respond to emails quicker, streamlining their administrative progresses.
- **Require a personalised collection of principles for each club that is an official club on application.** This will help outline what they promise to deliver as a club and what the club members can expect, when they are to join the club. And given how much the needs and styles of the clubs vary so much, this will still help support the club and create a realistic commitment for clubs.
- **Consider introducing a clear and well defined process for what to do when issues arise** within a club which is aligned to our [Values and Behaviour policy](#) and our [Resolving and Settling Differences Policy](#).
- **Have an annual check-in with clubs.** This is designed for us to receive an update on their activities, their membership and to check the student status of their club lead and second.
- **Remove a club from the Association website if there has been no response from them in an entire academic year.**
- **No accepting clubs that are too similar in purpose/intention to existing clubs, societies or groups.**

4.4 Safeguarding and inclusion

Before discussing recommendations regarding this aspect, it is important to mention the highlights shared with use from club leads. This was a Tweet from an alumni student: "I'm alumni but still help to run the OU Students Association Language Club. I asked a question the Facebook page & I've had so many wonderful answers from our linguistically diverse community. I'm very grateful to @OpenUniversity and @OUstudents for our clubs 😊 #languagematters". As mentioned before, this simply reinforces that clubs are operating relatively well across the piece. With implementation of these recommendations, we anticipate it will continue to improve.

Below are the proposed recommendations to increase the safety within clubs and the protection of their members:

- **Making club leads and second leads officially recognised volunteers.** This would mean them undertaking our basic safeguarding training on application.
- **Club leads to have a better knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.** Encouragement for club leads to provide a link to the Association's code of conduct and relevant policies that is pinned in their group; and developing a closer link between the clubs and the wellbeing services available to students.

4.5 Protected characteristics

The last area of recommendations relate to protected characteristics. This was a quote from a member in the neurodiversity club: "I feel the Association and OU are making huge changes to better support neurominority students". Although we recognise that especially the neurodiversity students feel that they need more support and recognition. This not only came out of the survey, but also as a finding from the AMS.

We hope that the proposed recommendations below will help improve the inclusion, support and representation of students with protected characteristics:

- **Additional support and training will be provided to clubs which have a purpose related to students with protected characteristics.** They will be offered additional support from the Association's staff team. When assessing their application, the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) will be invited to be part of the Clubs Application Panel and the EDI and Student Welfare Team will be consulted. DBS checks and additional training will be considered where it is deemed necessary.

5. Next steps

5.1 We would like the CEC to discuss our proposed recommendations and provide their feedback. If these recommendations were to be approved, then we would be working towards implementation of these recommendations and we would hope that these changes will bring increased levels of communication. Not only between the clubs and the Students Association, but also communication within the club. We also hope that it would increase engagement with an overall increased sense of satisfaction within and between clubs. The Student Community Team and VP Community will be held responsible for carrying out these actions and implementing these recommendations.

5.2 We aim to begin implementation in summer 2022, with plans to review the impact of this 6 months in. We anticipate, that if approved the implementation of these recommendations could lead to significant reduction in the number of affiliated clubs due to lack of engagement. However, we believe that those which remain will be more engaged with us and their members, thereby further improving the student experience.

Georgia Demopoulou
Project Officer (Student Community)

Anca Seaton
Vice President Community

Appendix 1

Current guidelines

Please see below the Association's current code of conduct, as well as the wider guidance to clubs, followed by the proposed support clubs are able to receive from the Association:

1. Core principles
OU Students Association clubs are separate legal entities, however when associated with the OU Students Association, club members are expected to:
 - Act in the interests of the wider community of OU Students Association members.
 - Exercise sound, rational judgement.
 - Show appropriate respect and consideration when communicating with fellow students.
 - Act with moral integrity, honesty and in an ethical and honourable manner. Dishonourable content such as racial, ethnic, sexual, religious, and physical disability slurs are not tolerated.
 - Act in an open and responsible manner. Be careful discussing things where emotions run high (e.g. politics and religion) and show respect for others' opinions.
 - Be transparent, have fun, and connect with others.
2. Equal opportunities and discrimination whilst promoting free and open discussion, the OU Students Association will not tolerate discriminatory behaviour or harassment whether aimed at its members or by them at others.
3. Active participation: a member of the club must let the OU Students Association that the club is still actively running once a year.
4. Social media: please adhere to the core principles when communicating on any social media platform. If a mistake is made (e.g. spelling/grammar mistake or incorrect event date) correct it immediately and be clear about what you've done to fix it. Be transparent when using social media, however be aware of your privacy. Do not put up any contact details that you do not wish for anyone to know. Clubs are allowed to discuss Open University and OU Students Association business on social media networks. Please refer to the Social Media Guidelines 2016-2018 document for more information and guidance.
5. Individual opinion: The OU Students Association values and respects that OU Students Association club members are independent and free to offer their opinions on issues but in doing so are expected to bear the core principles in mind. Considerable care needs to be taken to ensure that OU Students Association is not brought into disrepute in all publicly accessible media.
6. General application of this code of conduct. This code will apply to OU Students Association club members whilst the club is still associated with the Association. The intention is to ensure that the standard of conduct expected from students is consistent throughout the OU Students Association.

The support offered to clubs

If the club encounters any difficult issues, whether this is through social media or in person it is important to know that the OU Student Association is here to support you. Please do not hesitate to contact us for guidance. The Association has a zero tolerance to bullying, either online or in person. If you feel uncomfortable at any point

with a comment that another person has posted, please feel free to get in contact with the Association. Once associated, clubs are welcome to use the official club logo in their communications to help students identify associated clubs. We ask that clubs do not alter the proportions of the logo or any of the colouring, and make sure it's placed on a background where it is legible. The OU and OU Students Association logos are subject to copyright and should not be used.

Once your club is associated with the OU Students Association, we will post your club details and contact on our website, and can update these details as your club grows. The Student Community Team can also provide support in the initial set up of clubs social media pages, if required. A club may benefit from setting up a Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and/or Pinterest account, as this helps to create and strengthen a community for the club. Always be clear and concise in communications and try to respond promptly. The OU Students Association also has a newsletter and magazine that can be used to promote your club. Email oustudents-media@open.ac.uk to find out more. Collaborating with other clubs is a great way to reach a new audience with your club and the Association can help to put you in touch with other associated clubs.

Clubs can also act as a springboard if they so wish to become a Society. In addition, clubs have provided a way for struggling societies to maintain their link with the Association and their members. The Association is able to facilitate both these transitions when required.