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PRESIDENT

ROZ EVANS

I remember when I was a child (many, many years ago) that time used to pass really slowly and I thought that important events always took forever to arrive. Time seems to be moving a lot faster as I get older and I can't believe that my term as President has come to an end at Conference 2011. By happy coincidence this is also the time that OUSA Futures can finally be brought to fruition – with the good will of those attending Conference.

I have decided to limit this report to the major issues and events of the past 12 months and to some very important thank yous. It would be impossible to try to work out an order of importance (apart from the first issue) so these items are simply in the order in which I thought of them – my apologies if I have missed anything.

Fees and Funding

This year has seen many changes for students of the Open University as we try to ensure that Government and those with the power to decide the fees and funding for Higher Education are fully aware of the differences between part time and full time study. I am not entirely convinced that these differences have been fully recognised, but our Vice Chancellor, Martin Bean, and his representatives have been successful in achieving some important changes to the initial review. It is now expected that the majority of Open University students should have access to a student loan to enable them to continue or begin their studies when government funding is withdrawn. The Vice Chancellor was also successful in persuading the Government to reduce the number of points required to be studied annually to 25% of full time – which equates to 30 credits per year – in order to be eligible for student loans.

There is obviously an enormous amount of work that needs to be done to make sure that the Open University is capable of meeting any and all of the demands that will be asked once the government makes up its mind as to the direction in which it travels. The buzz word at the present time is 'fluidity' and I believe that our university is well placed to make the best out of the situation as it has already survived the E L Q (Equal and Lower Qualification) issue a couple of years ago.

Student representatives have been consistent in their support of the university with regard to the stance that has been taken on fees and funding. We understand that in the current economic climate it is impossible to maintain the current level of public funding, but we have been adamant that both the quality and level of student support should remain unchanged. The Open University has been successful in reducing costs over a wide area – the main issue of concern at the present time is the withdrawal of modules and qualifications which is impacting on current students. OUSA is actively engaged in trying to ensure the best possible outcome for all students

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POLITICS

The major issues mentioned above tied in with the decision of Conference that OUSA should be more of a campaigning organisation and I have therefore been trying to make sure that government ministers are aware of our concerns. I deliberately use the word 'trying' with regard to communications that I have sent to both David Willets (Minister for Universities and Science) and Vince Cable (Business Secretary) as it took until the beginning of March to receive an answer to my letters dated 25th October and 22nd December. Needless to say the reply managed to use a lot of words and include nothing definite. I am sure that there will be further communications from the next President – I hope they have more success than I have!

As a more visible sign of the new 'campaigning' face of OUSA I attended the November demonstration in London against cuts to higher education. I met with a small group of fellow O U students in London, ably supported by Wendy and Mandy from the OUSA office who provided us with wonderful placards and we marched as far as Westminster. We found that lots of people were interested in our opinions as O U students and many went away intending to find out for themselves whether part time study would be a way for them to avoid ever increasing student debt. We were fortunate enough to leave the march before things took a more violent turn as I do not believe there is any place for such actions and behaviour within OUSA.

At the time of writing another march has been organised for the 26th March – also in London – and I hope that OUSA will again be represented. I believe that it is extremely important that O U students have a visible presence wherever groups of students are represented so I hope that if there are any further such events we will be able to find volunteers.

FUTURES

We are going to have to think of another name for this venture because, with any luck, it is soon to become the Present. From the time that the Immediate Past President, Lisa Carson, first thought up the idea, until the time that the new Constitution is presented to Conference 2011 this project has seen the involvement of more students than any previous attempt to make lasting improvements to our organisation. The motions to Conference 2010 had been the subject of widespread consultation and were passed with such overwhelming enthusiasm that those officers involved were engulfed with a wave of euphoria. I really hope that we will be able to replicate that feeling this year when Conference votes on the new Constitution that will let us put in place the final pieces of the jigsaw.

Conference will also have the opportunity to discuss the first raft of new Bye-laws, which will also have been open to consultation by then. I am sure that the wave of enthusiasm that has carried Futures forward will continue and I am immensely pleased to have been involved with this. I think this is a suitable juncture at which to say a very special thank you to someone who has made such a huge contribution to getting us this far, Sandy Gibson.

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I would also like to express my thanks to all those regions and nations and the D S G, that took the plunge and decided to apply for a Section 15 exemption to trial aspects of our new organisation prior to Conference. I believe that the results of these pilots has been to reinforce the fact that every one of these units is unique and that it is possible for them to decide how best to represent their members while still maintaining an accessible and representative structure.

We are heading towards a very different looking OUSA – Conference willing – and I firmly believe that this will make us more relevant to our membership. We will have removed the red tape and bureaucracy that we believe prevented students from wanting to get involved and now it will be up to everyone to ensure that we have a visible and interesting presence. I am looking forward with interest to see what direction the Association will be taking over the next months and years – it is really very exciting.

That Moodle v FirstClass issue

Throughout the year the discussion has been continuing with the University with regard to the move from FirstClass to whatever alternative platform was to be provided. The main delay in the move turned out to be, not accessibility problems which were slowly being worked around, but the availability of a server on which the new system was to reside.

At the time of writing this report the move is expected to start in a couple of weeks time and hopefully be finished within a couple of months. The Vice Chancellor, Martin Bean, has told me that O U students should be extremely proud that their representatives, led by Laura Murphy with feedback provided by members of the Disabled Students Group, have brought accessibility to the forefront of the University's thinking with regard to on-line provision and that this has further influenced Google and the provision of Google Docs. Many congratulations to all those involved in this – O U students influencing a global giant is something we should be extremely proud of.

VOLUNTEERS

While thinking about FirstClass I would like to give profound thanks to all those people who moderate FirstClass conferences – they are unsung heroes whose patience and good humour means that we have been able to continue providing much needed support for fellow students. I was amazed to discover that some people do not recognise the fact that without these people we would not have been able to form the on-line community which we are struggling to replicate when we move away from FirstClass. To me they are a typical example of O U volunteers who work quietly in the background without any recognition – many thanks (even to those who have occasionally modded me, I know I deserved it) <grin>

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Another group of volunteers – this time more visible – who I would also like to thank are those who rep at Residential Schools and Award Ceremonies. As Residential Schools diminish this Association is losing a valuable opportunity to meet students face to face and tell them about OUSA – I am not sure how we are going to make up for this, but I know that the reps that we have will ensure that those students they meet have the opportunity to ask for further information. As usual, we are sadly lacking in volunteers for both Residential School reps and Award Ceremony volunteers – if you think you might be interested please visit our website for further details.

One final group of students that I would like to highlight are the Central Representatives who do such an excellent job in representing the students on O U Committees. These students are the ears of this Association as their reports often highlight new issues that V P Education needs to progress. Again, if you are interested in this role please visit the website – this is a very rewarding role which would entail a training seminar, and then 3 or 4 visits to Milton Keynes a year.

AND FINALLY

I would like to start by stating the things that I am so very grateful for. My time as an O U student and then as an active member of OUSA has, quite literally, changed my life. When I started studying in 2000 I was ridiculously shy for someone of middle age – I had never been away from home without my family and the thought of addressing a University Committee or, heaven help me, the Prime Minister or Conference would have sent me scuttling to hide in a darkened corner! I have managed all those things with a lessening degree of panic on each occasion and I am sure that this will stay with me for ever. So, for those of you who are too scared to address Conference this year, beware – it may not always be like that.

My studies with the O U proved that I was not as thick as I thought I might have been – graduating two years ago was one of the best days of my life and I was so pleased to have close friends there with me. Graduation ceremonies are the highlight of my presidential year – I feel extremely honoured to be able to share in this wonderful occasion with so many students – every one of whom has a story of individual achievement against the odds.

The list of people that I wish to thank is long and I hope that I don't miss any out. Firstly, thanks to all those who had faith in me through terms as Executive Committee Member for the South West, Vice President Equal Ops, Deputy President and then two terms as President. Their continued support has been essential.

Then there is the wonderful team that make up the OUSA office staff. Every one of them has offered individual help and encouragement to me – all with good humour when really they must have been tearing their hair out on occasions as I come up with another brainwave which means that they have

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to fit yet another project into their already crammed timetable. Anyone who becomes a member of the Officer Team can be assured that the people in the office will become their new best friends.

When I became President my new best friend was Trudi – OUSA's General Manager. To say this was a daunting prospect was probably one of the greatest understatements ever! I had always viewed Trudi as the holder of all knowledge with regard to OUSA and the O U – the one constant as we change officer team members every year. All this is true, but what I came to understand is that Trudi really is the best friend that a President could have. She has never over ruled what I wanted to do – but she has tactfully reminded or informed me that there might be better ways that would avoid me making a complete idiot of myself (for which I will be eternally grateful). She is fiercely protective of whoever the President is at the time and I know that whoever succeeds me will find her help invaluable. I hope that we remain friends for a long time – I can't wait to see what the new house in France is like and I have my paintbrush ready to travel when required <grin>

I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to the many members of the Open University who have listened to me at various meetings and committees and who have freely offered their time and advice – both to myself and other E C members. My special thanks go to Martin Bean, Vice-Chancellor and Will Swann, Director Students both of whom have always found time to talk whenever they see me and who have done me the honour of including me in confidential discussions regarding funding and the necessary changes within the University. It emphasises the importance that the Open University puts on its relationship with its student leaders and is something that has always made me very proud of belonging to such an institution.

Finally I would like to thank members of the Executive Committee, past and present. Chris Bell, ex Vice President Student Support, is personally responsible for my becoming a member of the E C. Several other people are responsible for my staying on the E C. In 2009 I experienced the dual problems of being made redundant and homeless at the same time. Without the help of fellow Executive Committee members I have no idea where I would be now, but I certainly wouldn't have managed a second term as President – I probably wouldn't have survived the first one. I have made lifelong friends during my time in OUSA – I won't embarrass them by naming them – but you know who you are.

Life will change dramatically for me following Conference 2011. I will be looking for another job as I will be moving – not only to a new home but also to a new country! This wonderful and somewhat daunting new start is all due to my deciding to study with the Open University and then volunteering to be chair of a local branch (if no one else wanted to do it).

Let that be a lesson to all of you – be careful what you volunteer for! But if you are willing to take that small step then wonderful things can be waiting for you in the future.

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DEPUTY PRESIDENT

TANIA ROGERS

The role of Deputy President is unlike that of any other officer and has only a few prescribed duties:

The Deputy President is elected by Conference and assists the President and automatically becomes President if that office becomes vacant between meetings of Conference.

In addition the Deputy President:-

- a) is Chair of the staffing sub-committee (whose terms of reference are approved by the Executive Committee);
- b) on behalf of the President, may approve the payment of expenses claimed by Executive Committee Members for Geographical Areas;
- c) shall be consulted when the President decides to use the emergency powers (constitution 11.10) to take action on behalf of the Executive Committee;
- d) on behalf of the President will lead special projects and development work for OUSA that does not clearly fit within any one other Officer remit;
- e) also has some responsibilities in common with Vice Presidents as shown in 4 below;
- f) co-ordinates OUSA participation as co-host with the University of the Open Day at Walton Hall.

I have endeavoured to support the President to ensure that it was not her workload that would force her to resign but have always been aware that I could be called on in that eventuality.

STAFFING SUB COMMITTEE

It is a great responsibility to take the chair of this committee and we are very fortunate in our staff as they show such continuous commitment to OUSA and the student body. I would like to thank them all for their dedication, professionalism and a sense of humour. They coped very efficiently when one member of staff was on long term sick and another on maternity leave.

The staff group has been enthusiastically engaged in detailed discussions about how to reorganise in order to take on the changes in working arrangements in preparation for the full implementation of OUSA Futures.

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CAP (Controller's Advisory Panel)

I was conscious of the compliment paid to me when the President asked me to take over the role of Chair of CAP and when she asked me to continue in the role when I was elected as Deputy President.

Over the year we have had a few changes but the following have been or are still serving on this committee: E C M North West (Matthew Ball), E C M Northern Europe (Pat Knight), E C M Republic of Ireland (Dermot O'Rourke), V P Student Support (Alison Kingan), and E C M Yorkshire (Jacqui Blackburn) as well as V P Finance (Carole Radcliffe), E C M East of England (Carey Shaw), E C M London (David Humble). This team widened the areas of experience and has made a huge contribution to the decision making processes. I cannot thank them enough for the amount of time they give to ensure that decisions are arrived at with a rigorous and well considered debate.

CAP concluded a Review of its procedures on behalf of the President and recommended the areas where the Guidelines might need updating. It identified a need to streamline administrative procedures, to clarify eligibility to serve as a mod and the position relating to individual moderator's rights to block individuals.

OUSA SOS (Student Organised Support) Project

The President asked me to take over the management of the OUSA S O S project as V P Education was very busy and we had worked closely together since its beginning. A forum was set up on F C and various threads were established to ensure that questions were collected in a logical order. Questions were provided by S A Ls (Student Academic Links), D S Ls (Disabled Student Links), Central Reps and a couple of representatives from the D S G (Disabled Students Group) as well as a number of individuals included because of their areas of expertise.

The questions were collated into separate documents for each of the various threads by E CM SALs. Three teams led by V P Communications, V P Equal Opps and V P Student Support looked through these questions and selected those which are most appropriate as F A Qs (Frequently Asked Questions). The teams used different collaborative tools to work together (FirstClass, wiki and googledocs) in order to provide the answers.

When the teams had submitted their final lists of questions and researched answers, I transferred all the documents to googledocs and then worked with VP Student Support and VP Education to ensure consistency and accuracy and checking that we had indeed found the most appropriate answers. This part of the process took a great deal longer than expected as verification and checking that all the links worked well was a very time consuming activity. I have now submitted our finished work to the relevant OU department and am awaiting confirmation of where it will sit in StudentHome. I found the project to

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be a very exciting one and have learned a great deal about things I didn't know before; most of all I learned where to go to look for help.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved – without their contributions there would have been no project.

And finally...

I have carried out the role to the best of my ability and have been fortunate in the support of my fellow Executive members. Bad weather and personal circumstances have meant that I attended some meetings online using a Skype connection and this itself has been a very interesting experience. I think that in the future more use should be made of remote means of holding meetings when this is feasible but I still feel that the importance of face to face contact should never be underestimated. I have been able to work with colleagues remotely because I have met with them however the new tools such as Elluminate and googledocs, googlechat, googlevideo and Skype have ensured that I have been able to continue to contribute.

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VICE PRESIDENT COMMUNICATIONS

TRAY DAGG

This last year has been an eventful one, both for O U S A and in my personal life. I have not been able to do as much as I would like to do, but I am proud of what I have done.

In order to prepare for the move across from FirstClass (F C) to the Virtual Learning Environment (V L E) I have removed a lot of the unused conferences from F C. This was so that there were fewer conferences to move across to the V L E, thus ensuring the move is quicker and smoother.

I have kept regions and nations updated as best I can through messages to First Class, The O U S A Blog, Facebook and Twitter and hope that the messages that I have been asked to deliver on behalf of the Association have reached as wide an audience as possible. The O U S A Facebook group and page has been opened up, so that all can post and comment on posts. On the whole this has been successful, but there have been a few spam comments/posts that have been removed as soon as I have had the chance.

I have tried to keep the O U S A Near You website up to date, but unfortunately my health has meant that this has not always been possible. I have carried on the work that was done by the previous Vice President Communications by ensuring that the O U S A Central Blog was up and running. This has been widely publicised and I would like to see this project continue into the future, to allow informal communication from all areas of the Association.

I am pleased that the O U S A website is now fully searchable (independently of the O U website) and this, I believe, has helped with the distribution of information as it has made things a lot easier to find on the website.

I hope that by the time that this report is published, that the O U S E T (Open University Students Educational Trust) page will have a PayPal donation link. This will allow students and friends of the Association to make one off payments, or to sponsor individuals (or groups of individuals) for events.

I was very proud to help process at the Birmingham Degree Ceremony with Roz (O U S A President). This gave me a chance to see, for myself, what the O U is all about, and what anyone can achieve – it was a really moving day.

Along with Alison Kingan (V P Student Support) and Joshua Brumpton (V P Representation) I have set up a working group to review the current meetings' guidelines, the idea being to make it so that the new guidelines cover both online and face to face elements of a meeting and so that the move to the

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V L E is taken into account. I hope that whoever is in this role next carries on with the work that has been done so far in this.

The two main things that I have been unable to achieve in my time as V P Communications are the adaptation of newsletter templates, to ensure that these are more relevant because with the phasing out of F C and the move to the V L E some elements of the current newsletters are outdated.

The other thing I would liked to have introduced would have been a welcome pack – for new and existing students that would give a basic outline of information about O U S A, its purpose and its structure but with the period of transition and the different structures in different regions and nations, I did not think it was appropriate at this point in time. I hope that the new incumbent would consider both of these projects as ones to take up when they take up office.

In closing I would like to thank those that have supported me through this last year – the entire O U S A Office team especially Wendy Burrell and Sandra Carter and also my colleagues on the E C, with special mentions for Roz Evans, Laura Murphy, Tania Rogers, Marianne Cantieri, Alison Kingan, and Sandy Gibson.

I wish all the best to all Officers, Executive Committee Members and Trustees for the year ahead.

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VICE PRESIDENT CONSTITUTIONS

SANDY GIBSON

First of all I would like to thank Conference for electing me last year. It has been a very busy and productive year. It has had its ups and downs, there have been agreements and disagreements but on the whole a very good year.

As many of you are aware the main focus this year has been on the Futures project, it has been discussed in many areas with consultation on the proposed New Constitution.

Once again part of the year was very difficult with various situations taking place within OUSA and in my personal life. I spent a lot of time dealing with OUSA Forums regarding how the Constitution should be used and clarifying many points to individuals within the Association, and it was not without its difficulties and a great deal of stress.

Within a month of taking office we had the updated Constitution and Register of Decisions, which was a mammoth task to get completed in that time frame. However, I have always felt and still do, that these are important tools for our members, and I believe this was much appreciated.

OUSA Futures is leading the Association into the 21st Century, and I believe that this year we have come to the end of a very large and worthwhile project.

The President, General Manager and I have been working on a model constitution which the Charity Commission has prepared with the National Union of Students and from this we have produced the New Constitution which will allow our Association to work in the 21st Century. This new Constitution has gone through extensive consultation, at Executive Committee level, FirstClass Consultation Forum and the OUSA Futures Briefing events. The conclusion to this exercise is before you as a formal motion to OUSA Conference, which, if accepted, will then be passed to the University Council and the Charity Commission for England & Wales, as well as the commissions for Scotland and Northern Ireland, if there is a requirement for their approval.

As well as the new Constitution I have produced the very first copy of very draft bye laws which I hope will allow the new Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees to get the new OUSA up and running, these will be available as a Consultation for all Association members to review and comment on before approval by the Board of Trustees and Central Executive Committee. Until these are adopted, Conference this year will be asked to approve an implementation plan, which will allow the change from the old to the new to be carried out in a co-ordinated manner.

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This year saw the introduction of pilots of the new style Assemblies for Nations and Regions, at the present time half of our Nation/Regions are Assemblies. On the whole this seems to have worked very well, and with so many already having led the way, we have ironed out problems and got solutions which will assist all the other regions when they become Assemblies. For information the units that have had a Section 15 Exemption approved are:-

- Scotland – OUSA Scottish Assembly
- Wales – OUSA Wales Assembly
- South – OUSA South Assembly
- London – OUSA London Assembly
- East Midlands – OUSA East Midlands Assembly
- East of England – OUSA East of England Assembly
- Southern Europe – OUSA Southern Europe Assembly
- Yorkshire – OUSA Yorkshire Assembly

In addition the Disabled Students Group were granted an exemption to allow them to trial being a Central Group.

All of the above units now have local Terms of Reference, allowing each unit to operate in a manner that is suitable to their requirements, rather than those imposed by the rigidity of the Constitution.

In addition we now have local groups in many areas from photography to social chat and meetings along with specific groups on courses and diversities. The groups are much less formal, and can operate in a manner that meets the needs of their members, and without the requirement for officers, meetings, minutes and accounts.

Over the last year, I acknowledge that I have made decisions which are not popular with everyone, but as university level students we can all appreciate that the decisions made are for the benefit of the Association and all our members whether at an individual level or Executive Committee level. The role is there to interpret the Constitution and that is the function I have undertaken. The fact that my interpretations have not been challenged at Executive Committee level, I am confident that I have made the right decision where required.

As I hand over the baton, I have looked at the four terms I have served. Initially we reformatted the Constitution to make it easier to understand, but that was only partially successful. Due to ill health I had to stand down after two terms, and along came OUSA Futures, and the requirement to comply with Charity law. When I returned as V P Constitutions in 2009, I knew that we would need a new constitution rather than simply re-writing our existing one but I would never have envisaged how difficult it was going to be;

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however, I am now pleased to say that we have got there. The next stage will be the bye laws, which as I have stated above are now in their very first rough draft, and these will now need to be taken forward. I wish my successor well in this task.

Finally I would like to thank a few people this year, my fellow Officers, the Executive Committee, and you, the Association. I would also like to thank the OUSA office staff for their support throughout the year, and many thanks to Ann Faithful, my main support in the Office. I would also like to personally thank Trudi de Haney for assisting with the new Constitution and bye laws, I don't think we would be at this stage without her reviewing and assisting in re wording. A final thank you and that is to my partner George for putting up with me during this time and assisting me where he could.

Have a good Conference and here's to a New Association fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

Thank You.

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VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION

MARIANNE CANTIERI

Do you remember the 'Ash Cloud', which closed U K and European airports last spring? ... I'll never forget it!

I had travelled to the U K on the Tuesday before Conference, to attend the Senate Reference Group and Senate meetings, so I was in England when the first cloud struck. Throughout Conference we worried about those delegates who were unable to get across the water to UK from Ireland and E U; on the Sunday I started wondering how I was to get home next day. ... I didn't get home!

I spent the week in Milton Keynes, looked after by our OUSA Office staff who all made me feel at home and was eventually met at the airport on the Friday, by my husband who had waited for me, even though the flight was marked 'Cancelled' on the arrivals board. Wonderful people, all of them, and they deserve my public thanks.

All in all I've been stranded in Milton Keynes, Geneva and at home several times over the past year, by more ash clouds, strikes and finally by the closure of Gatwick Airport due to snow, while I was basking in the sun at home.

One good thing did come out of all these attempts to prevent me from being where I should be; I've learned to use various different communication technologies. I've used Skype connections, phone conferences, phone links to meetings, Elluminate and Live Meeting, all of which have enabled me to participate actively in all my engagements as Vice President Education.

I've attended **Senate Reference Group (S R G) Meetings**; these are held prior to every meeting of Senate and are attended by representatives from every OUSA Region/Nation and an OUSA Central Representative from each faculty, as well as the 6 OUSA Senate members. The objective of the meeting is to discuss the papers for the Senate meeting, to give the Senate Representatives a broader view of student opinions on which to base their comments in Senate itself.

The O U Senate meets quarterly and is attended by representatives from all sections of the University, as well as Associate Lecturers and of course our 6 student Representatives. Our Vice Chancellor, Martin Bean has ensured that this year's meetings have been really focused, and that everyone, who wants to, is given the opportunity to speak and express their opinions. The Senate minutes can be found at: http://www.open.ac.uk/foi/p5_2.shtml

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As Vice President Education, I have a seat on **The Curriculum and Validation Committee** which meets quarterly. As its name suggests it is concerned with the structure of the Curriculum and the Validation of O U partner institutions, which are those colleges that offer O U qualifications as part of their syllabus and which therefore have to conform to O U standards.

I'm also a member of **The Open Programme Committee**, which is the Programme committee for the Open Degree. As the Open Degree incorporates modules from all faculties the committee has a very wide remit. There has been a lot of discussion this year, on the guidance that students are given about plagiarism and the differences between the guidance that is given on modules from different programmes. The wider advertising of the Developing Good Academic Practices (D G A P) website and information included in the new O U 'Help' service should go some way to rectify the situation. Another major topic of discussion resulted in the recent amendment made to the Open Degree. This allows holders of one Open Degree to complete another Open Degree without having to take 60 credits at Level 1 from key level 1 introductory modules nor having to include 60 level 1 credits of credit transfer, also the full range of discontinued key introductory modules will count to all qualifications in the Open Programme.

The Student Support Review (S S R) has been in its final year of Piloting and evaluation; as has been the case over the past few years, I have had regular meetings, both formal and informal, with the Programme Director and the Programme Manager who have not only kept OUSA up to date with the running of the Pilots but also asked for and received our input into the design of the evaluation process. The Programme Director has given presentations of the S S R to Central Representatives, OUSA Executive Committee and the S R G who were also invited to attend the presentation given by Will Swann, Director Students to all Senate members, prior to the January Senate meeting. Both OUSA President and I have been invited to take part in the final S S R Workshop as 'Critical Guests'. The results of the Review are due to be presented to Senate in June this year, if the recommendations are accepted and implemented, the students' journey should be considerably improved.

Developing Good Academic Practices is a programme designed by the O U to help students avoid plagiarism. I had met with the designers of the programme during its preparation to give a 'Student's-eye-view'. However this year I was invited to meet the Senior Manager, Examinations and Assessment, to discuss how to ensure that more students use the website. My suggestion, that it be made more visible to students, seems to have been put into practice as it is now on the O U Help initial page and there is (at least on my current course L185) a link to it on the Module website. The programme is excellent and I'd advise anyone who has any doubts about how to avoid plagiarism to work through it.

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Changes to the Science Degrees have been implemented this year and there is still consternation amongst students especially around the introduction of the 'Virtual Practical Science Module'. The Science Faculty arranged a presentation of the new module. I must admit to being very sceptical about the idea prior to the presentation and a lot less so afterwards. After the session I tried an experiment; I set up a WIKI and asked all those who had attended to contribute their opinions many of which were that they were somewhat reassured having seen the presentation. Copies of the WIKI were sent to the Dean of the Science Faculty and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Curriculum and Qualifications). I had never used a WIKI, but the experiment was a success and I'll use them again in future.

The Appointments Sub Committee (A S C) is set up by the E C to consider all applications for the Central Representative posts and to make recommendations of appointments for the approval of the E C as a whole.

Having introduced the Central Representatives Online Training Pack last year we reorganised our selection procedures this year, holding the first part of the A S C Annual General Meeting to review the application forms and make initial recommendations for approval to the E C in May; new applicants were then asked to complete and submit the Online Training Pack and all applicants were invited to attend the Central Representatives' Seminar in July, which was attended by all members of the A S C. The final decisions on recommendations of appointments to committees were made the day after the Seminar and submitted to the E C for approval. Members of the A S C found this arrangement a great improvement on the previous system as they were able to make their recommendations having seen the applicants working under committee conditions at the Seminar.

We were pleased to welcome members of the O U to the **Central Representatives' Seminar**, the Senior Assistant Secretary to the Vice-Chancellors Office led a session on the Governance structure of the University; the leader of the D G A P project presented the website; the Qualifications Based Services Project was presented by the project leader and the programme manager and one of the Pilot team leaders gave an update on the Student Support Review. Planning for this year's Seminar has already begun and I was delighted when Will Swann, Director Students accepted our invitation to present a session and that Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum & Qualifications) has agreed to join us via phone.

The European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (E A D T U). The Annual Conference of this association is hosted by a different member university each year; this year it was the turn of the Universitäre Fernstudien Schweiz and it was held in the beautiful village of Zermatt, Switzerland. The aims of the Conference are to bring together delegates from all member universities to discuss innovations in distance teaching.

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For the past three years OUSA and students' associations of European universities have been able to send delegates to represent student views. Last year the E A D T U Student Council was set up and, OUSA President, Roz Evans and I were both appointed as members. We were pleased to discover that the O U is not only very highly thought of by its peers, but that the other student delegates were very impressed, even jealous of the support given to us as students.

We attended as many of the plenary and break out sessions as we could and learned a lot about the new ideas that are being piloted Europe-wide. It was however, noticeable that once we said we were O U students, the delegates from other universities were far more interested in asking about our experience and how the O U did things than they were in answering our questions.

OUSA – S O S (Students Supporting Students): The idea for this new system of support, offered to students by OUSA originated in a scheme operated by, 'sparqs' (student participation in quality Scotland). Our version was developed by OUSA, in consultation with the O U, to the state in which it was passed by Conference 2010. I was charged with leading the implementation of the project; however, in September family pressures led me to the conclusion that I couldn't give the time necessary to lead the work, so I asked The President to hand the leadership over to OUSA Deputy President who had been working with me on this.

O U Help Service: In September the O U Help service went live online. You can find it on StudentHome at the far right in the top line of buttons. It doesn't jump out at you; in fact it looks as though it might well be something like the help button in First Class. ... it's not. It is a full guide to the University, a guide, which tells students where to find different types of information and there is an A to Z guide, which is very complete. It is quite definitely the first place that any of us with an O U related problem should turn to for help. Of course, if you can't find a satisfactory response there, or if you'd prefer advice or support from other students, then it's time to contact **OUSA**.

I have long felt that **OUSA's Register of Decisions**, which is where all the Policies, passed by Conference are published, has grown into an unwieldy document. Many of the policies it contains in the Education section cover specific issues that could be more efficiently resolved by direct contact between Vice President Education or a Central Representative and the appropriate member of the University. So after consultation with the Central Representatives and the Education Standing Committee I worked my way through it and weeded out everything that couldn't be covered by a simple general statement.

What else have I done this year? Well as in previous years, I have tried to be in contact with as many members of the O U staff as possible, in order to keep

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up to date with new and ongoing projects; it is also a great help to 'know' the person I am contacting about student problems. This year it's also been the other way round, I've been contacted by people in the O U and invited to be interviewed or join in projects. I've read and commented on all the documents referring to new modules and qualifications or the changes or decommitment of existing ones and I keep up to date with all the reports that Central Representatives write about the committees they attend. I've also participated in the preparation of the Frequently Asked Question (F A Qs) of the O U S A – S O S (Student Organized Support) as well as answering the numerous queries from students that come into my mailbox.

I've worked closely with the OUSA Office Representation Team, Alison, who looked after me specially well after the ash cloud stranded me in Milton Keynes, Tracey, without whom the Central Representatives might never get to the right meeting at the right time and of course, Jackie who's made sure that I was in the right place at the right time, she's accompanied me to meetings, sent me gentle reminders when something I should have attended to has got lost in the depths of my mailbox, made invaluable suggestions of ways to improve how we work, but above all she's kept me smiling with her lovely sense of humour.

There are of course many others, members and officers of the Executive Committee, the Immediate Past President Lisa Carson and our current President Roz Evans who have helped to make my three and-a-bit years as your Vice President Education thoroughly enjoyable. There have, of course been times when I've been frustrated and asked myself 'Why do I do this?', but they've never lasted long, something has always turned up that has made me realize that I do it because I believe its something well worth doing. I've rarely seen rapid results, but whenever I see a problem solved, or an idea, which I suggested in a meeting long ago, put into action it all seems worth while. I've learned a lot over these years, met a lot of wonderful people, some of whom will be friends for life, I've argued with people, said 'No' when I thought it necessary and agreed when I believed the others had a point.

Will I miss it? ... Yes I shall.

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VICE PRESIDENT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

CELIA WEEKS

Introduction

This is sadly my last report in the role of V P Equal Opportunities, I have had a wonderful time, that has seen me, walking the streets of London, carrying my banner and shouting slogans on fee rises and the loss of the grants system, following the Browne Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review, (and will be doing the same again at the end of March) or sitting up late at night talking to a student on the telephone or online who has struggled with some aspect of their OUSA or O U Life, such as the meeting of Baroness Prosser from the Human Rights Commission, or the variety of National/Regional Directors in their perspective Nation/Regions. I have attended O U conferences and taken part in a variety of O U workshops and activities, taken part in a question Panel with the National Director of Scotland, met all three presidents of the NUS. I furthermore, was able to celebrate the O U 40 years with the O U and the Minister for Education in Wales and the First Minister in Wales. Along with attending a variety of Course launches.

And before going into the functions I would like to thank everyone who has helped me, or taken part in the work I have undertaken over the past 20 months I have been in role, especially those who have been my confidant and support, to name you all would fill up the space here for everyone's report not only mine – but you know who you are <smile>.

This year again has been another very busy time, drawing on all of my skills and knowledge of the education and its sector diversities, with many meetings face to face or online, with many different consultations that have been facilitated, and the assortment of tasks to ensure that all diversities are represented within our University. More specifically within OUSA, OUSA Futures has been very much within my remit, to ensure that this is brought forward in a non-discriminating way, and the facilitation alongside my fellow Association Officers and Executive Committee Members of many OUSA Consultations including the Constitution Consultation the SOS Frequent Asked Questions Consultation and the Officer Remit Consultation, alongside the more role specific Consultations such as the Groups consultation or the Code of Conduct and Student Guidance consultations. All of which have now reached satisfactory conclusions.

More remit specific, we have moved into the field of supporting our Offender Learners, moved more to offering support when English is a second Language although there is a way to go with this. We are supporting the variety of diversities by providing information and services and encouraging participation all over the spectrum of OUSA and the O U. Providing the ability for students to create Groups rather than have to rely on the old branch system, has allowed me to encourage more diversity in these groups, especially within the Nations of Scotland and Wales, who both either have or

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are contemplating a variety of groups including Lesbian, Gay,. Bisexual and Transgender) L G B T T or the Rural Scotland Islands Group.

And in more detail:

Disabled Student Group

Elections held in September 2010, saw a number of 'New Committee Elected' although there are currently a number of vacancies, which will most likely be filled at the next casual elections, post Conference.

Moderation of D S G Forums, throughout the year, this has been a challenging role at times, and I would like to thank those moderators who have helped with our numerous consultations that have taken place. V P Student Support and I, revamped the Spirit of Conference for the D S G Forums.

I have helped with producing an article for O U Student, and also the last OUSA D V D.

FirstClass forum, V P Student Support and I have been keeping an eye on the variety of forums, answering questions and dealing with queries and issues as and when required, these have ranged from basic moderating, to questions of how to function without a chair, or issues of voting.

This Group also became very active within the Disability Impact Assessment both on the e-forum and on other FirstClass forums.

One of busiest periods for the D S G, was when we began, in response to a request from the University, with the working Group putting together many recommendations to the O U's Disabled Student Allowance (D S A) department about some of their current paperwork. These recommendations have been received with much enthusiasm.

Another D S G Consultation has recently come to an end; this is the work on the Student Employability Policy. This was also well received by the University who expressed their thanks to the Group.

The D S G have been a pilot as a Central Group and this has recently been approved by the Committee who have compiled, with a lot of support, from V P Representation and myself, a second Section 15 application. Alongside this, with support the 'Terms of Reference' were drafted which have also been approved by the Committee. The consultation with the full D S G membership has taken longer and is ongoing, (see Groups in this report) alongside the future of the D S G is at the time of writing currently under discussion. There are a lot of queries as to the format that the D S G want to take, at various parts of this consultation, working alongside V P Student Support we have been able to answer the D S G queries and help facilitate their discussions.

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Throughout December the Disabled Student Allowance (D S A) department requested OUSA's help to arrange a working group to look at the D S A application form as so many applications have to be returned to students who have not completed them properly or failed to provide the right evidence. The D S G was one of these working groups along with the Equal Opportunities group 'E O Brainstormers'.

Throughout the past year the D S G has helped inform a variety of issues, which have been raised within the University, many of which I have drawn to the attention of the varying departments of the Disabled Student Services.

Inclusive Student Group (I S G) update

At the beginning of this year, the Inclusive Student Group was very quiet and in order to try and look at what was happening with the individual forums, a number of questionnaires were posted the responses from these were minimal although I had received a request from them to consider setting up a group/network, as prescribed by Policy 48/2010. Having discussed this with some of the more active members of the I S G, they have asked if they can look into the feasibility among their own contributors, as to whether this will be a good idea. This has not taken off to date, although once the group moves to Moodle this could be a possibility.

I have continued to feed information into the relevant forums, including legal updates that may help students or the occasional survey or posting of information that is useful to this vast diversity. For example, a recent survey for students of the O U about religion and the use of religion in course materials, or an update for Carers and vulnerable people on the changes to the Criminal Record Bureau checks. The NUS have also provided a lot of information, which has helped students with a variety of services; these have also been posted regularly onto the I S G.

I S G and D S G Register of Issues:

This has been updated throughout the year with many items now completed. There have not been any issues highlighted for this document in quite some time, although I suspect this lull is temporary.

Group on Groups working group

This Group was set up as a body to act on the policy motion 48/2010 and following discussions at the last E C meeting, at which time the group planned to meet on the new Moodle Pilot area. Unfortunately this did not happen, due to concerns over accessibility. The Group is currently meeting on FirstClass, and within the O U Shared Activity playground. Following some teething problems with FirstClass, we had a full complement of members taking part. Some of these are members of the E C, others are activists and working alongside them, members who have not been active in OUSA prior to this.

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This working group, worked alongside, V P Representation and I, created a set of Guidelines for future groups and were able to provide other Association Officers with possible group's questions for consideration. These Guidelines were accepted at the recent E C meeting, and will prior to Conference be distributed around the Nations and Regions to help facilitate new groups.

This Working Group has worked hard to look at how we would go about contacting certain Groups and encouraging them to be part of the pilot project. This proved quite difficult. (See Groups report below) However the Group has continued to work hard and to discuss a number of important issues about the future working of Local and Central Groups.

This group will be disbanded prior to Conference, as its main objective was to support the original concept of Groups from motion 48/2010, and that has been achieved.

I would like to thank all members of the working group for their help and dedication.

E O Brainstormers Working Group

This Working Group has been set up to work alongside V P Equal Opportunities to provide a sounding board for issues and concerns that have been brought to my attention, or raised on FirstClass. Throughout the year discussions have included:

- Working with offender learners
- Discriminative and bullying language
- The concerns with working on Moodle
- Issues about replication
- Writing the terms of Reference
- Supporting the Group on Groups with ensuring groups are Equal Opportunities compliant
- Consulting with the Disabled Student Allowance Department on its application process

This group also has a discussion arena on Moodle; although posts are transferred back to FirstClass for those who currently still do not have access to take part in Moodle communications.

The facilitation of Motion 48/2010 Groups

Following a decision by OUSA Conference 2010, the E C were given directions and authority on the setting up of Central and Local Groups. V P Representation and V P Equal Opportunities were given the task of facilitating this motion - 2010/48.

Three pilots were considered. Two to pilot as Central Groups registered with OUSA Office and under the guidance of the two V Ps and one as a local group within a Nation/Region and responsible to the Assembly of that Nation/Region

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PILOT ONE: OUSA PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP

This group was set up with a minimum of advertising, with a notice placed in OUSA Post-holders and OUSA Photography Forums, this was then taken from there by interested post-holders and posted in many of the Nation/Regions forums, branches and newsletters.

This resulted in a very busy start to our new piloting group.

In the beginning we had some minor confusion which stemmed from miscommunication as to the purpose of the Group, it was felt that we were duplicating the OUSA Photography Forum, once this was cleared up (within 24 hours) by clarifying we were a Group not a forum, and we had a membership following. Since then we have had no difficulties, we work within the two mediums and work well.

PILOT TWO: DISABLED STUDENTS GROUP

This group was slightly more difficult to set up, as it already had a formal sector within the OUSA Constitution and to enable them to pilot as a Central Group, required them to place forward a section 15, this took some time to actually achieve, and was only approved late January. In the meantime this group, started looking at how they would like their group to look, and have created a terms of reference.

During the setting up of this group, there was a large amount of debate as to whether this group would lose or retain its current representational status, and to ensure that they retain a similar stature as prior to undertaking as a trial this has been worked into their terms of reference.

This group is to date, although relevantly approved by the committee, awaiting approval by the full membership.

PILOT THREE: OUSA SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN WALES GROUP

This group has been set up solely for students living in Wales, who require support, it currently does not have terms of reference, and it is not set up with any formal structure except, to have a point of contact. The membership is logged by both OUSA Office and the Assembly concerned. The Assembly has provided support to the group, in the form of information, and advertising.

GUIDANCE AND RECOMMENDATIONS GIVEN TO GROUPS

The original guidance given was a compilation from the motion to conference, discussions that had been had previously in the E C and on OUSA Matters

When asked on the opinion from the groups on the guidance given, one group commented saying: *'In my experience the draft guidelines worked well within my group'* quote by R T

These Guidelines with a few minor changes have been accepted by the Executive Committee and have been distributed around the nation/regions

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It will also be in the minutes of the last E C meeting that

These groups will continue as formal trials until OUSA Conference, at which time they may continue as regular Central or Local Groups as per motion 2010/48 unless Conference or future OUSA Policy deems them inert.

OUSA GROUPS CONSULTATIONS

The Consultation of the Executive Committee ran from the end of the December E C until early January, this resulted in a compilation paper taken to the Futures Briefing following the briefing some minor changes were recommended this was then approved by the E C in March.

With the recommended changes this was then considered appropriate by the members at the briefing, although some comments as to if it was required to go back to Conference 2011, as Conference 2010 had already laid the foundations.

Code of conduct, protocols and student guidance

At the request of Conference last year, I worked to further the code of conducts the first for Executive Committee Members and the second for student volunteers, both of these have been completed and approved within the year and published.

Each set of protocols underwent extensive consultation and discussion within the Executive Committee before being formally approved.

Equality and Diversity Office

At the beginning of the year, I was invited to attend the Launch of the Single Equality Scheme, following this; I attended a number of meeting with the Equality and Diversity Office, and was honoured to be invited to the retirement event for Derek Childs in September.

Due to the continued cuts within the university my regular meetings with Tony O'Shea-Poon, have been incorporated with the meetings with the Disabled Student Services, to enable us to have a more rounded meeting, and for longer periods at a time.

Outwith, these meetings we have still had contact with Equality and Diversity Office and have received updates on the O U implementation policies and the actions for the various departments to ensure they are equality and diversity compliant. English as a second Language and cultural diversity also featured regularly in our discussions. The department have also agreed to provide handouts for all attendees at Conference 2011.

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Offender Learners

An OUSA article was printed in 'Inside News', an O U newsletter that is sent to both student offenders and students in secure accommodation, such as hospitals or group homes. Within two weeks of its publication, this article received a number of responses, these have steadily continued since. These responses highlighted some of the issues pertinent to these groups of students and included

- Times that tutors can visit secure units are not always the best times to fit in with deadlines for T M As, and these times are controlled by individual units.
- Compulsory courses for different awards are not always appropriate to study in a restricted environment
- Internet research required for courses is not always possible, is more difficult to organise and can affect grades if this research is compulsory to an assignment
- Limited number of courses available
- Course funding difficult to source
- Difficult to know what to do after a degree and how to fund any future activities or plans.
- Lack of computers or the ability to access student home

Two of the letters were from respondents offering to write articles for O U Student. I have continued to respond to each letter as it is received, and also passing these on to the O U.

I have continued to have regular meetings with Helen Maxwell from the Offender Learner Unit of the University. Other current themes being:

Ken Clarke's (Minster of Justice) comments on more Education in Prisons, which is awaiting a white paper on this. Helen has requested more articles for Inside News. We have been informed by Birmingham Degree ceremony co-ordinator that once the next offender learner graduation takes place OUSA will be able to attend. OUSA now has a place on the 'Offender Learner Development Group' which meets 3 times a year in Birmingham. The Virtual Campus has progressed and is active and is being piloted in two prisons in the West Midlands. It is hoped that the virtual campus will provide the arena for offender learners and those in secure environments, to be able to post T M As through the system, rather than having to rely on others to post their assignments.

I also attended the Offender Learner Conference: The Student Journey: From the Inside Lane to the Open Road

This was a most informative conference at which guest speakers, welcomed by the Vice Chancellor, talked about the benefits to society with regard to education for Offenders. This conference had a number of workshops; the

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two that I attended were very informative; the first about the obstacles that an offender has to overcome before he/she can register for a course of education and the second, was an insight into the 'Virtual Campus' which is currently in a pilot stage.

Terry Waite C B E was the key speaker who gave us some insight into his time as a prisoner in Beirut.

D S G, Disabled Student Services, and Equality and Diversity Office Meeting

Discussions with the D S S departments over the past year included:

O U Support for young students under 18 and younger students (18-25)

Which although steady increase not substantially so Students with Mental Health Problems have the biggest pass rates “; this is very positive and encouraging for students with Mental Health Issues”.

The O U Financial Climate and the D S S

The Director, Students has stated that, that the provision will not go down, that front line staff will be preserved and none of the non-soft budgets to be cut, To date the D S S are:

Trying to be more efficient

Ensuring D S A and Student Support are not affected

Managerial will be re-sorted

No demise in the service as finding better ways of working to get more for students without the increase in spending.

The numbers of students are going up continually

Always enough resources for students

Student Fees and Access to Learning fund (ALF).

This is available to students with additional requirements or students identified as having a possible problem. They are encouraged to apply to this fund and are advised how to do so.

Comb-binding and course material distribution

O U S A has received an indication of a number of students who are unhappy with the comb binding service in relation to lateness of receipt of material.

I collated a report of students' experiences with Comb-binding materials; this was given to the Manager of Alternative Formats who attended the meeting to discuss this, and thanked everyone who had taken part in the report.

Since this meeting a number of changes have taken place, the O U are currently building a new delivery service which should alleviate the current problems with movement of stock, and eventually reduce the need for those

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receiving two copies of the course material. This will be piloted in September 2011.

Comb binding was also raised as an issue in the D I A (Disability Impact Assessment July 2010) yet another consultation, which I on behalf of O U facilitated.

Moodle

The D S S have been meeting with Ross McKenzie from L T S, Chetz Coldwell, and Sam Marshall, whom went through previous feedback from students on Moodle. As an outcome, Chetz has produced and updated the computing guide, the colour and fonts have been reviewed, issues based on different options many are these are addressed through what equipments students use. Other areas addressed have been; post automatically showing as read, the increased width of the messages; also, an inappropriate message has been removed. In the meantime, Moodle is updating to Moodle 2.0, this is undergoing significant testing:

E-Forums facilitated by the D S S have been inundated with students raising issues in the forum. These issues have taken away from the forum the function it was set up for. Although the D S S appreciate that there is a number of issues with E Forums they are addressing, the D S S felt that to request students participation in a specific subject E Forum, could this be achieved where the subject matter remained, and not taken over by students highlighting and discussing issues, could these be taken elsewhere, this will most likely be the case before the next round of consultations as it is hoped this will be on the Moodle system not the FirstClass system.

Training for Association Lecturers (A L's) specifically for students with Mental Health Issues, or the training of Invigilators and amanuensis have both being topics of much discussion and which the O U have made many changes, to ensure that A Ls training is updated to include any area not previously covered such as Mental Health or working with under 18's. Or are able to facilitate our disabled or students with additional needs in exam or tutorial environments, whether online or face to face. This training is not only specific but has enabled the University to provide specific resources for the tutor within tutor home.

English as a second language:

This was discussed with the Deputy Director of Scotland in my recent visit, there are currently two pilots being held in Scotland, from which the feedback I have received is very positive as these have been functioning for some time. It is hoped that these would stem further into the United Kingdom, and this is currently with the Equality and Diversity Office for their opinion. This will not be completed within my term of Office; therefore details will be passed to my successor.

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OUSA Futures

Again I have been included in a number of OUSA Futures consultations, including the pilots mentioned above and below. I have worked closely with V P Constitutions to help him by bringing both my skills and understanding of the Charity Commission, Companies House and the Education Act together into both the Constitution and the Bye-Laws and look forward to hearing the thoughts of Conference about the NEW OUSA. There has been a phenomenal amount of work taken place on both of these, from a variety of arenas, including public consultations and office back stage work from OUSA office and our General Manager, to produce such an expansive and workable document.

Work within the Nation/Regions

I have worked with different Nation/Regions providing support to these mainly by telephone, or email, I have had the honour of attending both the inaugural meetings of the Scottish and Wales Assemblies, seeing both of these in action and the first to pilot the new style of OUSA. At both I was able to trial my own Equal Opportunities training, which was well received and seen a diversity of Groups set up as a result.

I was made to feel extremely welcome not only by the OUSA members but also by the National Directors and their Assistants and Deputies. Both of these Assemblies have moved OUSA Futures forward in their Pilots, although they both work quite differently, to achieve the same objective – to represent and support students, to facilitate and inform the Executive, and this is shown in the successes of their groups, their meetings and their trainings. Both of these Nations achieved on their Assemblies approximately 50% of previously non OUSA Activists, and continue to encourage new students at every opportunity.

OUSA in Wales, is where I have had more work, being an ex-officio member of their Assembly, I have helped with the production of Newsletters and the creation of Groups, whilst facilitating with the Executive the Online and Face to Face Meetings.

Open University in Wales Committee – I have Chaired this committee for the last year, this term will end in June 2011.

- Motion 60/2010: this motion was referred to the E C. I have spoken with the OUSA Office about the feasibility of storing equipment in the Office. The advice is this is not possible due to the limitation of storage space. I will continue to research the options.
- Constitutional Motion 48/2010: This motion was addressed through the Group on Groups working group, and through the three Groups Pilots as highlighted above.

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- Constitutional Motions 50/2010 and 51/2010: both of these motions are being covered under the OUSA SOS F A Q consultation.
- *Policy motion 67/2010: This is still being raised at every opportunity, we have moved forward with getting various sectors of OUSA, posted out with various materials, including all new O U Students - completed as continued action*
- Policy motion 86/2010: these items have been reaffirmed at every opportunity with the Open University

I am sure there is more that I have missed from this report, including the fact that I have not gone into details of the various consultations that I have either helped facilitate or have taken part in and the individual items as I felt that you would be more interested in the outcomes of more Equal Opportunities overarching remit.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this role, and again thank you to everyone who I have met along the way, I wish the new incumbent whomever they may be every success, and to say you will meet a diversity of lovely people as you travel through the Role

If anyone would like to discuss any item on this report or have any issues they wish to highlight them please do email me.

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VICE PRESIDENT FINANCE

CAROLE RADCLIFFE

This year my report has to start with a massive thank you to many people. Last year, at Conference, I joined the group of people who fell down the steps; I did this just as Conference had finished and therefore, luckily for me, not many people saw it happen. Unfortunately for me I had slight concussion, a twisted ankle and I broke a bone in my elbow. I had problems getting home but I had an offer of a lift from a fellow officer but she would have had to go very much out of her way and so Roz drove me home in my car and Laura drove to my house in Roz's car. I forgot that I had another Officer's coat in my car which was eventually returned at the September Executive Committee (E C) meeting; luckily she lives in sunny climes. I was able to attend the May Officer meeting due to a fellow Officer giving me lifts. Cutting food when we had meals was a challenge but again my colleagues helped me. Papers and reports still had to be done and this is where I have to say a massive thank you to Sally Kitchingman, Assistant General Manager Finance, and to Trudi. Sally had to give me extra help which she did so willingly and to make sense of what I had typed one handed. Unfortunately it was at this time that I was unable to attend the May Societies Standing Committee meeting as travelling was still a problem.

My role is very diverse and it covers a wide range of activities. I deal with all aspects of OUSA finances, the Central Budget, Branches, Regional /National Forums or as some are now Assemblies, Residential Schools and approving the accounts from Societies. I am also one of the Trustees of OUSET, on the Staffing Sub-Committee and Chair of OUSA Services Ltd. I have listed below under different headings my various activities since Conference 2010.

Resolutions

There were two Policy motions from Conference 2010 that came under my responsibility. The first one 2010/48 was also allocated to Vice President (V P) Equal Opportunities and V P Representation; they have taken the lead on this and will report on this separately. The second motion 2010/52 was allocated to both me and V P Constitutions; this was to ensure that the E C worked with Societies. I have stayed in contact with the Standing Committee and when they had a concern, raised at the November Society Standing Committee, this was reported back for me to the December E C. Unfortunately I was unable to attend the December E C Committee Meeting because like many other people I was snowed in.

Branches

Approving Branch accounts and grants is a major part of my role. This year for the period 1/8/10 to 1/3/11 I have approved 33 Branch accounts. The reserves held by these Branches are a total of £8252.29. The total amount in grants that have been paid is £1696.86. The majority of Branches either did not claim any grant or held twice their annual grant already in reserves.

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This year I had to recommend the closure of three Branches for non-submission of accounts to the March E C meeting. I would like to thank all of the Executive Members for geographical areas for ensuring that so many Branches submitted their Branch accounts by 30th November.

Regional/National Forums/Assemblies

This year all bar one Regional/National Forums/Assemblies had submitted their accounts. Officers from the Regional Forum contacted me and the Finance team in the OUSA office and I have now prepared and approved this one. One of the National Forums, whose CUBS account was frozen last year, was unfrozen after they managed to have Officers in place.

Residential Schools

I presented my report on Residential School finances to the March Executive Meeting. In 2010 OUSA was represented at three sites although representatives from the South-East did greet students at Sussex Residential School and I would like to thank them in my report because Residential School is an introduction to OUSA. The interim and final accounts for all three sites were received.

In my report, to the March E C, I reported that from 2011, to make the finance side even easier, only final accounts need to be submitted; this is due to the implementation of the spreadsheet. The new date for the accounts to be submitted is the 30th November.

In 2010 the new weekly spreadsheet was implemented which will help the co-ordinators. I have to thank the Residential School Working Group and fellow members of the Executive Committee for their help and input.

A summary of Residential Schools 2010 is shown in the attached Appendix.

Central Accounts

Attached to this report are the audited accounts for the period 1st August 2009 to 31st July 2010.

I have drawn up a balanced budget for 2010/2011, as attached. All of the current services have been maintained whilst keeping within the budget. As with the previous year it is due to keeping within the budget that we were able to hold the important Futures Briefing Event in January and to give the opportunity for so many students from all the Regions/Nations to attend.

Finally

There have been other duties and events that I have undertaken which do not come under any of the headings but I have listed them here. I attended meetings for both OUSET via a telephone link, I was unfortunately snowed in, and the Staffing Sub-Committee.

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I would again like to thank so many people but the list would be endless because I received a lot of help during what can only be called a challenging year. This would include the President and everyone else on the Executive Committee. I would like to thank all the staff in the OUSA office for all of their work and help, especially Sally Kitchingman and the rest of the finance team for their help and support throughout this busy and challenging but thoroughly enjoyable year.

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Appendix A

Audited Accounts of the Association to 31 July 2010

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Appendix B

Budget for 2010/11

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Appendix C Residential School Accounts Summary

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OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Appendix C

SUMMARY OF RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL ACCOUNTS AND DISBURSEMENTS 2010

LONDON REGION: QUEEN MARY RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (3 weeks – 347 Students)	2010 (3 weeks – 400 Students)
Total Income	£361.14	£396.04
Total Expenditure	£214.53	£204.67
Net Income	£146.61	£191.37
Disbursement:		
OUSA	(£23.87)	(£35.59)
OUSET	£170.48	£226.96
Interim & Final accounts received		

SOUTH WEST REGION: BATH RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (5 weeks – 1263 Students)	2010 (5 weeks – 1110 Students)
Total Income	£4,585.99	£3,501.52
Total Expenditure	£3,121.69	£1991.48
Net Income	£1,464.30	£1,510.04
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£805.75	£8.60
OUSET	£658.55	£1,501.44
Interim & Final accounts received		

EAST MIDLANDS REGION: NOTTINGHAM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (4 weeks – 981 Students)	2010 (4 weeks – 1140 Students)
Total Income	£3,222.31	£2,931.05
Total Expenditure	£1,931.73	£2,572.47
Net Income	£1,290.58	£358.58
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£138.07	(£450.88)
OUSET	£1,152.51	£809.46
Interim & Final accounts received		

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NORTH REGION: DURHAM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (0 weeks – 1217 Students)	2010 (0 weeks – 1168 Students)
Total Income	£0.00	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£0.00	£0.00
Net Income	£0.00	£0.00
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£0.00	£0.00
OUSER	£0.00	£0.00
No OUSA Representation at Durham again this year.		

SCOTLAND: HERIOT WATT RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (3 week – 372 Students)	2010 (0 week – 0 Students)
Total Income	£2,770.98	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£1,272.25	£0.00
Net Income	£1,498.73	£0.00
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£965.99	£0.00
OUSER	£532.74	£0.00
There was no school at Heriot Watt this year.		

SOUTH EAST REGION: SUSSEX RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL		
	2009 (4 weeks – 1098 Students)	2010 (0 weeks – 1530 Students)
Total Income	£2,045.40	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£591.98	£0.00
Net Income	£1,453.42	£0.00
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£765.83	£0.00
OUSER	£687.59	£0.00
No OUSA Representation at Sussex this year.		

COMBINED TOTALS		
	2009 (5278 Students)	2010 (2650 Students)
Total Income	£10,940.42	£6,828.61
Total Expenditure	£6,540.20	£4,768.62
Net Income	£4,400.22	£2,059.99
Disbursement:		
OUSA	£1,885.94	(£477.87)
OUSER	£2,514.28	£2,537.86
Final figures for 2010		

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VICE PRESIDENT REPRESENTATION

JOSH BRUMPTON

Introduction

I first attended Conference last year, as a regional delegate and became interested in the operation of the Association and began becoming more involved than I had been until that point. When the post of V P Representation became available under a casual vacancy I looked into the details and saw a position that I thought would be a very interesting and challenging one and so I stood for election - truthfully with relatively little expectation of success - and was elected shortly after, coming into post mid July. And I've discovered that my initial impressions were correct - it has been a highly interesting experience and most certainly a challenging one, but definitely not a decision I regret making.

As with anything else, there have been the highs and lows, excitements and disappointments, successes and failures during my time in this position and in this report I will never be able to capture the full experience of these last months, so I won't try. Instead I shall in the following sections attempt to stick strictly to a factual account of events and developments that I have been involved in within this role.

Residential Schools

One of the significant parts of this remit is the oversight of OUSA at residential schools. One of the first things I did after being elected was to arrange a visit to one of the sites to get a better understanding of how things worked here.

Based on what I saw there and input from many other people I have made several changes to the way in which we function with regard to these events. This ranges from new recruitment and publicity material to revised job descriptions and improved paperwork.

Work has also begun on preparation for the 2011 residential period. All schools have at least one co-ordinator in post and the first set of reps have been approved. Obviously as residential schools occur in the summer months, there is still a way to go with this.

Degree Ceremonies

My main roles with regard to degree ceremonies have been to ensure that every site has a co-ordinator and that they are given sufficient training and support to carry out that role.

By using a central pool of co-ordinators, any gaps unable to be filled by the local nation/region have been appropriately filled.

There is an online training package available which has recently undergone an update and that combined with the event in the next section of this report will, I believe, have enabled all of the co-ordinators to carry out their tasks.

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Training and Brainstorming Weekend

In February I ran a 2 day event in Milton Keynes for all of the co-ordinators for residential schools and degree ceremonies.

Originally this had been planned as a purely training exercise, as has been done in the past. However it was felt that we were potentially missing an opportunity here for discussion and therefore it underwent a redesign.

The training element remained, but was cut down to essentials – those bits that it is much harder to get a sufficient grasp of from an online package for those doing this for the first time. Most of the weekend was spent discussing our practice in various matters connected to volunteering, recruitment, advertising etc.

I felt the weekend was very much a success and one that I hope will be able to be repeated in future years.

Groups

Conference 2010 approved a motion that has now become Policy 2010/48. That is the policy that outlined our intention to establish 'Groups and Networks'.

Well, as you may have noticed, the term 'Networks' has disappeared off somewhere and may or may not return. However, in co-operation with V P Equal Opportunities, I have been working to develop Central and Local OUSA Groups.

This has included compiling a basic set of guidelines for operation which outlines the essentials of how a Group can function, initiating 3 pilot Groups (2 central, 1 local) to test these guidelines and give us feedback and watching how the regions and nations operating under section 15 were dealing with this to try and find something suitable for everyone.

The guidelines have now been completed and approved by the E C and the pilots have all been successful. I believe this project has been a very beneficial one and hope to see many new Groups appearing over the coming months.

Regions, Nations and Branches

I have provided support to various local units within the Association wherever I have felt it appropriate or they have approached me. There have been too many individual and highly varied cases to try and outline my activities with regard to this, but it has been what I have spent a large part of my time doing and I didn't feel this report would be complete without mentioning it.

Working with those members who are at the very local level is something that I think is fundamentally important for OUSA. These are the people that we are supposed to be representing and without them we might as well just all go home.

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Conclusion

I could keep writing this report for days. There have been so many events I've attended, projects I've been involved in and issues I've dealt with that I have barely been able to scratch the surface here. But I hope that I have been able to provide an insight into the work I have done over the past months.

Before I end this report however, I would like to take the opportunity to thank 2 groups of people. Firstly those who voted to give me this chance in the first place. And secondly - and on a much more personal note - those members of the E C who have made this an amazing experience by providing reassurance and support, sharing success and friendship and just being there when needed. You know who you are. Thank you.

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VICE PRESIDENT STUDENT SUPPORT

ALISON KINGAN

I have enjoyed the role of Vice President Student Support since being elected in late August. I would like to thank the O U S A Office Staff for their help and support during this time, as well as the previous postholder, Tania Rogers for answering any questions I had. In addition, the wisdom and knowledge of the current President, Roz Evans, has been invaluable.

INDUCTION MEETING

I was fortunate to be able to meet with members of OU Staff from 6 Departments as part of my induction; I received some interesting information.

Complaints and Appeals:

This department receives, records and monitors complaints. They do not respond to complaints nor decide if a matter is a complaint.

Disabled Students:

A technology loan system could be accessed by students before they have been assessed for D S A or if they don't qualify for D S A. Regions / Nations should be the first port of call but more specific things can be dealt with centrally. Some DAISY recordings are with a human voice. Students who need materials comb bound under 100 pages should contact the Disabled Student Resources team at disabled-student-resources@open.ac.uk. Generally only materials over 100 pages are comb bound automatically.

Students given inaccessible P D Fs should contact their Regional / National Centre. If unable to assist the Region / Nation should contact the Disabled Student Resources team who will source the material in an accessible format. Presently it is not possible to state the accessibility level of P D Fs in the module description but Regional / National Centre should be able to inform students of P D F accessibility levels.

Central Disciplinary Committee:

Half of the Committee are students. A legal background is not necessary but common sense is useful. The Secretary to this Committee contacts the students, whose cases are being heard, on behalf of the Committee and carries out investigations. The student is able to put their point of view before the Committee.

Learner Support Framework:

The OU have identified ways to increase successful completion of modules and progression onto the next course. Students find that discussing module choices aids progression to the next module. Contact from the O U before the module begins, support mid module and access to module forums for students re-sitting or deferring their exams are beneficial. Exam support can be accessed via an Education Advisor at Regional / National Centres.

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Exam and Assessment Board:

The board tried to ensure that no students were penalised by difficulties experienced in the DT840 exam in 2010. Module results will shortly be sent via email rather than post. By 2013 more modules will be starting in October than February. The O U is still working on solutions to the problems for those submitting e T M A s in some modules, for example Mathematics.

The Good Academic Practices website offers advice on how to avoid plagiarism.

<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=399993&direct=1>

Financial Support:

Funding depends on the student's place of residence and various grants could be available if certain criteria are met. Students should contact their Regional / National Centre to see what funding is available. Financial Support currently available to some students is likely to be reviewed in the near future.

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL TRUST (O U S E T)

At the Board Meeting of O U S E T some of the criteria regarding requesting of O U S E T funding were amended. The percentage of course fees which can be requested is now 90%. The current criteria can be found on the website at <http://www.open.ac.uk/ousa/ouset.php>. Many students are continuing to benefit from O U S E T.

DISABLED STUDENTS GROUP.

I attended online meetings with the Disabled Students Group Committee and provided assistance as they worked towards being a pilot Group.

STUDENT ORGANISED SUPPORT (S O S)

Frequently asked questions have been collected and answers to these questions have been sourced. Peer Support will be included under the umbrella of S O S in its current format, on whatever platform is considered appropriate. Peer Support will operate totally independently of other S O S student volunteers.

O U S A INFORMATION HUB

O U S A Office Staff are considering how to respond to queries from students and activists in an accessible manner. They are working towards having an Information Hub which will include paperwork, information and real time responses. The latter can be achieved by the staff integrating their knowledge and remits a little more than at present.

PEER SUPPORT

I have been in consultation with the members of the Office Staff responsible for the Peer Support system. They are working alongside the O U to ensure that O U S A will be able to have Peer Support operational post FirstClass.

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LEARNING TEACHING AND STUDENT SUPPORT COMMITTEE

I attended this November meeting. The Committee received a report about how much module content was delivered online and another about Student Progression.

LEARNING TEACHING STRATEGY REVIEW MEETING.

This workshop was part of the review process to ensure that the OU is aware of the positive aspects of their Learning and Teaching Strategy. The OU feels it is important to retain the best parts, despite the financial difficulties, but to adjust or remove the parts which are not effective. O U S A was a small part of this group with various representatives from across the OU also attending.

COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS STEERING GROUP

In February I had a meeting with Lottie Flook (OU) regarding the Complaints and Appeals Steering Group. Lottie is looking towards changing how this operates with the inclusion of more practitioners in order that information can be shared and more consistency is likely to result. O U S A will be given a presence on this new group.

FUTURES WEEKEND

I attended the meeting alongside other members of the E C and students who were interested in learning more about how O U S A would operate if Conference delegates agree to the proposed changes to be brought at Conference 2011. It was useful to inform some students as well as receive feedback from them.

FACEBOOK

I finally discovered how to get the V P Student Support I D working on Facebook. After much experimentation I found that Facebook rejected any account names with 'V P' 'Student' or 'Support' in it – fortunately I didn't take it personally! The Account is 'Ousa St Supp' if anyone would like to befriend V P Student Support. I have assisted a few students who would not have contacted me on First Class. As V P Student Support I gained the impression that some students are unaware of available information and support. One reason for being on Facebook is to share some of that information.

V P STUDENT SUPPORT CONFERENCE STALL

One reason for having a Student Support Stall at Conference this year is to make information available about support and financial assistance.

FUNDRAISING FOR O U S E T AT CONFERENCE

There will be a Raffle, a Second Hand Book Sale and the Little Bo Peep fundraiser. Prizes for the Raffle and donations for the Book Stall will be gratefully received. Details of these will be sent to Conference delegates. The Office Staff have a number of local students assisting them in the Second Hand Book Sale. These fundraisers could not go ahead without donations, purchasers, student volunteers and O U S A Staff, so **thank you**, to all those who make these possible.

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STUDENT MEMBER OF COUNCIL

LAURA MURPHY

As I sit down to write this report to Conference 2011, at the last possible minute, there is unfortunately still no news worthy of report. As you will be aware, this year has been dominated by the fees and funding issues created by firstly the Browne Review of Higher Education, followed swiftly by the Comprehensive Spending Review, which looked to shave billions of pounds from the public spending bill, including Higher Education.

Lord Browne proposed a brave new world for Higher Education in England. He proposed a market driven H E sector, where the money would follow the students, and Universities would compete to attract students, and the fees they would bring with them. For the first time, Part time students would be treated on a par with their full time counterparts, with regards to funding, but unfortunately this went hand in hand with withdrawing much of the funding from the sector, allowing universities to charge up to £9000 per year per student, and funding all this by way of fee loans, which would need to be repaid once a students earnings went above a certain level.

Still reeling from this announcement, and the lack of clarity that came with it in respect of the part time sector, the new Conservative government then announced major cuts to the H E budget, effective immediately. For a university which was still cutting it's spending to meet the cuts imposed by the previous E L Q policy which withdrew funding for those who were studying for an Equivalent or Lower Qualification, just when we thought we couldn't cut any more, we had to breath in again.

So, we have moved form knowing each year what our funding from the funding Councils would be the next year, to a world where HEFCE can write to the University in January and inform us of an in-year funding cut, which is then immediately effective to the end of that funding year. Imagine it as having a household budget of £100 per week, so, £5,200 per year. $\frac{3}{4}$ way through the year, someone tells you you're having a 10% in year cut, but you don't lose £10 per week, you lose £40! Welcome to the world of O U funding.

None of these shenanigans affects the other U K nations, or the students who study outside the U K. In Scotland and Wales, there are elections scheduled for May of this year, and no one wants to announce cuts before an election, so there has been reasonably little movement there, although Scotland has had some in-year cuts. Wales has promised to cap its fees for Welsh students, and pay the balance with a grant from central funds, but they have held off on deciding what to do for part time students, and the fear is that by the time they get around to dealing with them, there will be no money left.

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European students have had a 10% cut in their fees this year, on the back of a climb-down by the British government in relation to a finding by the European Union regarding how it set its overseas fees, but this has led to E U students being very definitely loss making for the university.

This will mean differential fees for O U students going forward. European students will probably be charged the same as English students, which is the full cost of providing the course, while Scottish and Welsh students would pay lower fees as their legislatures approach things differently. It's not yet apparent which way Northern Ireland will go, possibly somewhere between the two extremes.

The other issue that has taken much of my time this year was the decommissioning of FirstClass and the move by the University to using forums on the V L E, or Virtual Learning Environment. These, as they were first provided were not especially user friendly, although some did love them, many found them clunky and unworkable when compared to the old system. Many hours have been spent by me, and those dozens of students who fed information and comments to me, working to make the V L E a suitable place for OUSA forums to move to. As I write, we're almost at the finish line. We have made major gains in the accessibility area, with more scheduled for completion between now and next October. What we haven't been able to get changed, we have work-arounds for, and I think we have raised the issue of accessibility to the top of the O U IT agenda. It's been quite a slog, but we have managed to educate people within the IT management of the University, who can now see things from our side, and see what went wrong. We are now included for comments on all the new projects, at design stage, so we can point out possible problems before systems are written, rather than having to get them fixed afterwards. Martin Bean commented to OUSA President recently that OUSA should be very proud of it's achievements in the accessibility arena, as we've influenced not just our own University, but also Google who provide the email system, so we are in fact making improvements for students all over the world. I think O U students should take a very large bow on that one. Give yourselves a pat on the back, ladies and gentlemen, it's not often we get to make the world a better place.

I suspect this coming year will be more of the same, fees, funding and V L E. We'll be moving to our new online home, and settling in there. We can expect the government white paper on Higher Ed in May or June, but the Education bill to give effect to it will not happen until possibly 2012, so it's a long road to be travelled yet. I will continue to update as much and as often as possible, both in my reports to the E C, and online wherever questions are raised. I'm in the unusual position of being the only E C member who knows they will definitely be in post after Conference, due to the timing of terms of office, but I look forward to working with the new team to bring OUSA smack bang up to date, and as ready to face the 21st century as we can make it.

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CHAIR OF OUSA (SERVICES) LTD

CAROLE RADCLIFFE

OUSA Services Ltd (O S L) sells merchandise through OUSA's presence at Degree Ceremonies and Residential Schools, and by mail order including through the Web store. Our presence at Degree Ceremonies and Residential Schools is important for promoting OUSA and also provides a service to students and others which is valued by the whole University community.

Degree Ceremonies

The main Degree Ceremonies begin in April and this year they are continuing until October and OUSA has a presence at all of them and is therefore able to market its range. This is important for both the graduates and their families as they are able to purchase a memento of their day. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank all of the volunteers who man the stalls because they work very hard.

This year to assist Degree Ceremony co-ordinators to communicate with volunteers, especially new volunteers, a welcoming checklist has been prepared by Ann Faithful, Assistant General Manager (Organisation) which will be sent to co-ordinators. The idea for this welcoming checklist is so that there will be communication before the ceremony with everyone taking part. I have already received positive feedback from one co-ordinator.

Residential Schools

Last year OUSA had a presence at three sites, although due to the nature of Queen Mary in London we are only part time there. We hope that offering a range of merchandise and past exam papers makes a contribution to the residential experience.

I would like to thank the Residential School volunteers for all of their hard work and ensuring that students enjoy their time whilst attending events. Also I would like to thank the various representatives from the South-East Region who greeted students at Sussex therefore ensuring that OUSA was represented.

Accounts 2009/10

The accounts for the period 1st August 2009 to 31st July 2010 are attached to this report. Although the amount of the covenant was a little less than last year the Directors were again proud to have been able to return significant funds to OUSA. In line with the terms of our covenant all taxable profits were returned to OUSA which in turn has donated them to OUSET.

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Marketing

We have continued to use the CAMEL system for marketing the O S L range this is continuing to focus on different areas of the range at various times of the year and it is targeted to particular students. This year we have decided to supply the popular Hooded Top in red as well and to extend the sizing that the Hooded Top is supplied in. The reusable shopping bag will now also be available in red and black as well. This is another popular product and also environmentally friendly.

Cheques

Unfortunately we have had to take the decision that we are unable to accept cheques from the end of June 2011 at Degree Ceremonies or at Residential Schools. This is due to U K Administration Ltd which provides services to the banking industry will be stopping the cheque guarantee system. If O S L continued to accept cheques then we would no longer be protected. It was felt that as only a very few cheques were used by customers in 2010 that this move will not impact O S L.

Finally

I would like to thank my fellow Directors, Roz Evans, Laura Murphy, Alison Kingan, Sandy Gibson and Trudi de Haney for their suggestions and help this year. In the OUSA office I would like to thank Ann Faithful, Assistant General Manager (Organisation) and her team for all of their hard work through the year.

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Appendix A

Audited Accounts for the Company to 31 July 2010

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GENERAL MANAGER

TRUDI DE HANEY

Those of us with a close involvement in OUSA probably share the characteristic of dividing our world into what happened before the last Conference and what has happened since. I certainly always look back to my previous year's report for a reminder of the burning issues and pressures of a year ago, with the question in my mind – well what have we achieved, what's happened since then?

One of my preoccupations in the lead up to last year's Conference was how we would fare in our visit to Nottingham University's Jubilee Campus. We had originally hoped to be back at Milton Keynes for Conference 2010 but unfortunately the extent of building work on the Campus here, coupled with the fact of make-shift arrangements for catering, suggested that this would not be a good idea. This left us with a rather unexpected need to search out an alternative venue capable of meeting our quite challenging set of requirements. Using a venue for the first time is always quite a nerve wracking experience for staff; no matter how much care is taken to research the facilities there is always that nagging concern that something won't quite be 'alright on the night'. Well, how did we do on that score? Student feedback told us that there were quite a lot of good bits to the venue, but there were also some indifferent bits and some bad bits. I have to say however that the staff experience was of a gulf between the marketing patter and the customer service experience - and if it had not been for the extent to which our staff were prepared to knock themselves out plugging the gaps and gaffs left by our hosts, the experience of our students would have been considerably the poorer. On the plus side, this has given us even more enthusiasm than usual for a return to Milton Keynes this year.

There is something that feels very good about holding Conference on the O U Campus in Milton Keynes. There are not many Universities where the overwhelming majority of students will never get to see their Campus – and its good that OUSA can provide that opportunity to a few hundred students each time we meet here. After all, as many who first arrived expecting to see only a large warehouse full of packages for the post (!) soon discovered, there really is so much to see – both in terms of history, in terms of cutting edge technology and in terms of some of the most eminent academics on the planet! And, to cap it all, the catering facilities are also much better now too!

Turning back to the substantive business of OUSA Conferences, last year I shared the anxious anticipation of the Executive Committee as we awaited the verdict of Conference delegates on the substantial package of proposals that were the outcome of three years hard work. The response of delegates was nothing short of magnificent. It might have taken longer than initially expected, but all the work and effort put into discussing, consulting, listening, revising and re revising, finally seemed to have been worth it. Conference 2010 gave a

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massive thumbs up to radical change where previous attempts had foundered. In my opinion I think this was because in previous attempts to make changes, there wasn't so much a lack of support for change as a failure to clearly articulate a shared vision of what OUSA could look like if it managed to change. Well Conference 2010 resoundingly signed up for that vision and sent away the incoming Executive Committee to get building. Let's hope that delegates this year are impressed with what has been achieved so far.

However much talk and action there has been about OUSA Futures, let us never lose sight of what the whole point of the project has been about; the more effective representation of O U students and the improved ability to service their needs. I do very much hope that all those attending Conference – and very many across the O U community who aren't able to join us – spare the time to read the reports here of the President, her team of fellow Association Officers and other leading figures responsible for various aspects of our activities. If you needed it, you will find proof here aplenty of the huge range of issues in which those you elected to represent you have been involved on your behalf. We left Conference last year shortly before a U K General Election which was destined to usher in massive political change – although we perhaps could not have quite anticipated the manner in which the Coalition Government would shape up. Since that time the report of the Browne Review and the Comprehensive Spending Review have completely transformed the Higher Education landscape raising massive questions for the Open University about how it can best protect its mission and its students in an increasingly uncertain world. Your student representatives have been there, inside and outside the University, making sure that your voice is heard. One thing that is very certain is that OUSA is going to continue to need to be able to attract students of calibre to be involved - whether in the Regions and Nations, on the Executive Committee or as part of the Central Reps team – in a period that is otherwise fraught with uncertainty. The real litmus test of the success or otherwise of the OUSA Futures project is if we are able to secure the contribution of those students

I do not intend to repeat information detailed in the reports of others, but will say a little about some issues important to staff. We have had a very stable staff team for the last few years but I would like to introduce a new member of the team Helen Janes who joined us as Assistant: Finance last Autumn and who will this year be attending her very first OUSA Conference. We are very pleased to have Helen on the team and if you come across her I feel sure you will see why.

I also want to tell you about something that is important to the whole of the staff team. At the outset of the Futures project, staff were promised help and support in terms of development and training, to equip them to carry out new roles, changed requirements and meet the new demands placed on the staff group by a substantially altered organisation. The staff team have been extremely co-operative throughout the length of the project, pulling in work on

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revising systems, supporting the additional events and activities agreed by the Executive Committee and doing their best to support and assist pilot schemes and trials running alongside existing systems and workloads. Until very recently, this was done with very little additional support. However, the Staffing Sub Committee has been concerned for some time about the question of whether or not we had sufficient staff resources to meet the challenges posed by major change – in the short, medium and long term. The Executive Committee supported Staffing Sub Committee's recommendations in the autumn to invest the funding saved on the switch from paper to electronic mailings in the staff team. However, at the same time we are all only too aware of the uncertainty of the funding situation at the present moment and both I and the Staffing Sub Committee have been anxious to avoid a situation whereby solving today's problems might only lead to exacerbating the job security of our staff tomorrow. I am extremely pleased that, in collaboration with the O U Director, Students, the Staffing Sub Committee, and on their recommendation the Executive Committee, have recently agreed a package of support to assist staff in a way that will leave scope for final decisions to be made when we are clearer about the future funding scenario. We have agreed to use the services of a company, IKON, specialising in change management and staff development to assist us for a period of up to a year. They will be working closely with me and the staff team to help us to make the changes we need to make to measure up to the revised expectations of the staff team that were integral to the proposals agreed by last year's Conference. Part of this support consists of an interim Manager, Susan Palmer, who will be working with us four days a week. Susan's primary role will be to take on a substantial part of my current responsibilities for running the office to enable me to spend far more of my time working with the incoming President, Association Officers and Executive Committee. Critical to the success of our new organisation is making sure that our key resources – the leading, elected student representatives and the professional staff group – are working in harmony to maximise OUSA's ability to serve the massively diverse body of people who are O U students. I am personally very grateful for the support that the Staffing Sub Committee members have shown to me by being prepared to invest in the development of the OUSA staff.

Finally I couldn't end this report without a word about "my President"! I actually didn't know Roz at all well when she became President – which is fairly unusual. I was aware that she had a big reputation for sense, fairness and seemingly boundless enthusiasm. I have gradually learned since then that Roz is very much in the tradition of the best OUSA Presidents – she is indomitable (though still being incredibly modest, she probably won't recognise that one!), she is resourceful, she has a wonderful sense of humour and, as the essence of an O U student, she is most certainly unique! Roz Evans has done good things for OUSA and I very much hope that OUSA has done good things for her – she deserves it!

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CHAIR OF OUSET

LISA CARSON

We started the year with no change to the board of Trustees which gave us some stability.

There were changes to the board later in the year due to Linda Brightman's retirement and changes in the OUSA Officer team.

This year has demonstrated the unpredictable times in which we find ourselves. When I reported to Conference last year we were expecting the tough economic climate to possibly increase the caseload, when the reality has been the opposite.

That said we are mindful that the outcome and impact of the Browne report has not been fully realised. I am quite sure that there are departments in the University working on various permutations and until this plays out we will not know the impact on OUSET. This is obviously an area that the board will continue to monitor.

OUSET has been in a healthier financial state this year than anticipated in particular due to the bequests received. These have secured our ability to assist students at a time when fundraising is more difficult for many organisations and access to training and education is more important than ever.

One bequest received in recent years caused difficulties in that the restrictions placed upon it made it extremely difficult for the Trustees to utilise the funds. The Trustees wrote to the executors and were offered a reduction of the funds available but with greater flexibility on how these funds could be employed. The Trustees gratefully accepted this offer as it would enable us to utilise the funds in the spirit of the bequest.

Bequests can make a considerable difference to the funds available and I would urge all who have benefited from the educational experience to consider the inclusion of such a bequest to OUSET to help realise the aspirations of future students.

Funds for OUSET are raised via OUSA, from OUSA (Services) Ltd, the N U S Card or direct contributions, notably, University Booksearch. However I would also like to acknowledge the fund raising that takes place by individuals across the Association. This includes activities held at Conference, residential schools and within regions and nations. Also thanks go to OUSA Services Ltd (O S L) and OUSA whose covenant of O S L's profits is the relatively stable contribution to the Trust. All these things mean that the Trust can continue to give grants to worthy applicants.

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For the year 2010-2011 we have received 60 applications with grants having been made to 48 of these whilst 7 await decisions from the Trustees. In money terms this equates to a total of £26,619.60. Accounts for the year 2009-2010 are presented with this report.

Over the last year the majority of cases have been presented to the Trustees solely online reducing the amount of paper printed and posted. This may be small fry in the scheme of things but at a couple of reams of paper per Trustee this year is a contribution to saving a tree or two.

I wish to acknowledge the work of my fellow Trustees over the last year: The President of OUSA, Roz Evans; Vice President Finance, Carole Radcliffe; Vice President Student Support, Tania Rogers and Alison Kingan; the Open University Vice-Chancellor's nominee, Linda Brightman and Barbara Stephens; co-opted member, Chris Bell and OUSA General Manager, Trudi de Haney. I would also like to acknowledge the continued support of the staff in the OUSA office.

The Trustees consider all applications based on the criteria however it is important to understand that the cases reflect the diverse population which studies with the Open University. The Trustees constantly juggle to balance between the financial need of the individual and responsible use of the charity's funds.

Every donation to OUSET does make a difference to an individual and I would like to thank you again on behalf of those students.

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Appendix A

Audited Accounts for the Trust to 31 July 2010

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CHAIR OF SOCIETIES STANDING COMMITTEE

CAPT. ALASDAIR FARQUHARSON

At the OUSA Conference 2010, held at the Business School Centre, Jubilee Campus, University of Nottingham, the Societies Standing Committee (S S C) also held its Annual General Meeting (A G M) at which I was duly re-elected as the Chair of the Committee for a fourth term.

At the meeting I thanked all the representatives of the various Affiliated O U Student Societies for all their hard work and kind support.

In line with normal practice the Committee held the normal meetings at Walton Hall during the year, with the able support of Wendy, Sandra and the staff at OUSA. We also continued with the practice of online meetings prior to the face to face meetings at Walton Hall.

The S S C remains strong and active and following on from the last Conference we have continued to work hard to further strengthen communications between Societies and OUSA. The benefits to O U students of having their Societies affiliated continues and this further enhances the student's university experience in challenging times. The finances of the S S C and Affiliated O U Student Societies remains satisfactory.

This year the S S C on behalf of its members has supported a number of Motions to Conference.

We have had a number of new societies join us since the April 2009 OUSA Conference and I am particularly pleased that the O U Law Society has at long last been re-established and is now active.

University education is going through very difficult times due to financial constraints and the reduced or lack of meaningful government financial support, with students having to pay higher fees and students at the O U having reduced opportunities for Summer School attendance, where practical experience can be gained of the subjects studied.

The need for viable student societies offering the chance of some practical laboratory and field work, especially for science students, is of even greater importance and I am sure our Affiliated O U Student Societies will rise to the challenge.

We have not had a Societies Representative to the E C since 2009, therefore the election of a suitable candidate is a top priority this year.

Again I have stressed the importance at meetings of the S S C of all affiliated societies having a formal display at Conference and the need for society display arrangements to be in a suitable area in order that we can capitalise on marketing/promotional opportunities.

I thank this Conference and OUSA for their support of Societies and the S S C. It has been a great privilege to have served on this Committee.

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Progress of Resolutions and Referred Motions

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PROGRESS ON CONFERENCE 2010 RESOLUTIONS AND REFERRED MOTIONS

NOTE: Comms – Communications, Cons = Constitutions, Ed = Education, E O = Equal Opportunities, Fin = Finance, Rep = Representation, S S = Student Support, Pres = President, D P = Deputy President, Cou = Council Member, G M = General Manager

Motions referred to the E C are in bold.

Resolution 1 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Constitution to reflect status of U K Nations

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 2 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Constitution to reflect move from FirstClass

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 3 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Delete 5.3.2.5

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 4 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Add new 5.3.2.11

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 5 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Delete 6.2.2

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 6 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Delete 6.2.10

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 8 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Insert 6.6.3

Action/Status – Completed

Resolution 14 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Replace 15.1

Action/Status – Completed

Policy 2010/ 15 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M

Subject – New Constitution

Action/Status – Completed

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Policy 2010/ 16 and 17 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – new OUSA Conference
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution

Policy 2010/ 20 – Responsibility G M
Subject – Delegates to Conference
Action/Status – specifying new database and related systems: in process

Policy 2010/ 21 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Cycle of Conference
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution

Policy 2010/ 22 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Date of Conference
Action/Status – Conference 2012 booked on M K Campus 22/24 June

Policy 2010/ 23 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Officer Remits
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 24 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Unpaid Volunteers
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution

Policy 2010/ 25 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Conference to Elect Officers
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 26 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – August Take Up of Posts
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 27 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Casual Vacancies
Action/Status – to be covered by Constitution Annex and Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 28 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Central Executive Committee (C E C)
Action/Status – included in Constitution

Policy 2010/ 29 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – C E C Membership
Action/Status – included in Constitution

Policy 2010/ 30 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – C E C Geographical Area Member Elections
Action/Status – Pilots in force; further work required as part of Bye-Laws

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Policy 2010/ 31 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Central Executive Committee Meetings
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 32 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Standing for More than One Post
Action/Status – Motion to Conference 2011 and/or Bye-Laws issue

Policy 2010/ 34 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Committees & Working Groups of E C
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 35 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Election Process Managed by Staff
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 36 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Election Process Managed by Units
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 37 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Student Profile Information for Elections
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also being trialled under Section 15 pilots

Policy 2010/ 38 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Provision for None of the Above
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also implemented immediately

Policy 2010/ 39 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Casual Vacancies Post Termination Date
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 40 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Centrally Run Elections
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 41 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also being trialled under Section 15 pilots

Policy 2010/ 42 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies - Purpose
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also being trialled under Section 15 pilots

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Policy 2010/ 43 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies – Geographical Units
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution

Policy 2010/ 44 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, GM
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies Executive
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also being trialled under Section 15 pilots

Policy 2010/ 46 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies Reps
Action/Status – ongoing as part of new Constitution and also being trialled under Section 15 pilots

Policy 2010/ 47 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M, Fin
Subject – Regional & National Assemblies Funding
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 48 – Responsibility E O, Rep, Fin
Subject – Groups and Networks
Action/Status – Guidelines agreed by E C at March 2011 meeting

Policy 2010/ 49 – Responsibility Pres, Cons, G M
Subject – Policy Reviews
Action/Status – further work required as part of Bye-Laws

Policy 2010/ 50 and 51 – Responsibility Ed, E O, S S
Subject – Revised Student Support Service
Action/Status – this policy has been progressed. Fuller information included in Deputy President's report

Policy 2010/ 52 – Responsibility Cons, Fin
Subject – Working with Societies
Action/Status – kept in focus in progressing OUSA Futures plan

Policy 2010/ 53 – Responsibility E C
Subject – Simple Role Descriptions
Action/Status – needs to be actioned by incoming E C

Policy 2010/ 54 and 55 – Responsibility G M
Subject – Statement of Expectations and Protocol for Contacts
Action/Status – Code for E C agreed by December meeting. Guidance for other volunteers agreed by E C in March.

Policy 2010/ 56 – Responsibility E C
Subject – Implementation of Policies
Action/Status – actioned where possible

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Policy 2010/ 57 – Responsibility Cons
Subject – Relevant Online System
Action/Status – Note added to Register of Decisions. Completed.

Policy 2010/ 59 – Responsibility E C
Subject – E C M Publication of Papers
Action/Status – Noted by individual members and new system adopted to provide speedier publication of the majority of papers.

Motion 60 – Responsibility E O

Subject – Wheelchair Ramps

Action/Status – VPEO spoken with the OUSA Office about the feasibility of storing equipment stored in the Office. The advice is this is not possible due to the limitation of storage space. VPEO will continue to research the options.

There is inadequate storage at OUSA Office on Campus, should units wish to purchase said equipment they will be required to source storage. Completed

Policy 2010/ 61 – Responsibility Rep

Subject – Branch Support

Action/Status – Ongoing process where applicable, in co-operation with local students and E C Ms.

Policy 2010/ 64 – Responsibility Comms, Cou

Subject – Better Means of Communication

Action/Status – OUSA due to start migration to V L E April 2011.

Motion 65 – Responsibility Comms

Subject – General Communications

Action/Status –

Motion 66 – Responsibility Comms

Subject – General Communications

Action/Status –

Motion 67 – Responsibility Comms and EO

Subject – General Communications

Action/Status – currently being investigated by the O U and OUSA is awaiting a response from them.

This is still being raised at every opportunity, we have moved forward with getting various sectors of OUSA, posted out with various materials, including all new OU Students - completed as continued action

Policy 2010/ 68 – Responsibility Cou

Subject – Student Feedback

Action/Status – being pursued vigorously with the O U.

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Policy 2010/ 69 – Responsibility Comms, Cou
Subject – Reporting Accessibility & Usability Problems
Action/Status –

Policy 2010/ 70 – Responsibility Ed
Subject – Education Policy
Action/Status – This is constantly being progressed by all Central Representatives and those Officers who have contact with the University in their discussions about student related issues with the University staff and in Committees. It will continue to be progressed while it remains OUSA Policy.

Motion 77, 78 and 79– Responsibility Ed

Subject – Submitting Assignments

Action/Status – V P Ed has discussed these motions again with the O U. The reason given by the O U is that the specifications on the file types to be used for the submission of assignments are to ensure that documents' contents are not distorted in the E-submission process. Full details of which file types to use and a link to video instructions on how to save your documents are available in the Messages section of StudentHome, "Restriction of file types accepted by the eTMA system, 2nd February 2011"

<https://msds.open.ac.uk/students/messages.aspx?msg=1502460111>

Policy 2010/ 80 – Responsibility Pres, Ed
Subject – Value of TMAs
Action/Status – it has been confirmed by various senior members of the University that students will continue to receive feedback in the form of marked TMAs on an individual basis.

Policy 2010/ 81 – Responsibility Pres, Ed
Subject – Five Year Phase Out of Awards
Action/Status – the customary five year phase out of awards is, in most cases, being observed and where it is not questions are being raised with the Faculties concerned. The continued presentation of named awards, that are due to be phased out, in collaboration with other entities has been discussed with the University and will continue to be raised at every opportunity.

Policy 2010/ 82 – Responsibility Pres, Ed
Subject – Science Degrees
Action/Status – Discussions are ongoing about practical work and the possibility of providing day schools or weekend schools instead of week-long residential schools.

Policy 2010/ 83 – Responsibility Ed
Subject – Flexible Tutorials
Action/Status – Productive discussions about the location and timing of tutorials are ongoing.

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Policy 2010/ 86 – Responsibility E O

Subject – Reaffirmed Policies on O U treatment of disabled students

Action/Status – awaiting confirmation of status

Policy 2010/ 87 – Responsibility Cons

Subject – Policies to be deleted

Action/Status – updated Register of Decisions published. Completed.

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