The C E C is asked to:-

i. **note** progress to date on this University project.

ii. **note** the event planned for Autumn where student presence is expected

Background

1. In recent years, student engagement has become an important aim in the Higher Education (H E) sector. Expressed here, student engagement is the role that students might play in the decision making that shapes their educational experience. Many UK H E policy initiatives have emphasised the importance of including students as partners across key areas of their higher education community including governance, strategy and curriculum development.

2. Earlier this year, the Students Association was invited to have a presence on the Open University Student Engagement Project Team. The President, Vice President Representation, Vice President Educational Support and Research together with OUSA’s General Manager and Head of Engagement and Support attended the project’s initial workshop in February to consider what student engagement looks like at the Open University and how it could be extended.

3. Further meetings centred around agreeing on a high level definition of student engagement which would guide the project and provide all parties with a clear understanding of the projects parameters and the issues included within its scope. During these conversations, the OUSA President requested that OU Students should be kept at the heart of the conversation.
4. The following aspirational statement was eventually agreed upon.

‘Student Engagement at the Open University is defined as the range of ways in which students are active participants in shaping their educational experience. The University aspires to engage all our students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

The University values student engagement because:
- Individually and collectively students are the University’s partners
- It promotes a sense of belonging and community and
- It results in the improvement of the educational experience.

All students are in scope – including research students and validated provision students insofar as they are engaged in OU Institutional governance/decision-making and quality assurance/enhancement applicable to validated provision.’

5. Areas of consideration were pinpointed under three headings. These were student engagement in:
- decision-making, governance and strategy,
- quality assurance and quality enhancement and learning,
- teaching and research.

6. Potential benefits for student initiatives were expressed as:

- Increased feeling of being part of a community and listened to
- Improved NSS student satisfaction ratings,
- Increased module and qualification completion, improved employability,
- enhanced personal development, maintained/improved rate of student registrations, maintained Quality Assurance, improved University decision making, enhanced reputation.

7. OUSA suggested that a gap analysis was carried out to identify the current state of student engagement, a vision of what the University wants to achieve and ideas about how to get there. From the analysis, it was suggested that an event should be held in late October/early November, that would provide a showcase of initiatives in progress at other institutions to illustrate to relevant OU parties examples of excellence in order to stimulate ideas and inspire OU staff to develop new approaches to student engagement as well as influence OU policy makers.

8. A sub-group was formed to plan the event and included a member of the Students Association. At the first meeting a draft plan was proposed and invitations written to key speakers. OUSA requested that as well as hearing from University staff, that students involved in these initiatives should also be part of any presentation in order to hear of their experience and feedback. We also asked to have a significant number of student places at the event together with travel expenses and these requests were agreed on.
9. Speakers suggested to present at this event include the following:

- Professor Mary Stewart, University of Lincoln, where in the school of performing Arts, a combination of staff and students researched into what content would make up an ideal first year experience, in particular identifying what would help students be better prepared for the next levels of study.
- Paul Chapman, Director of Student Support and Involvement, University of Manchester Student Union, where all projects relating to the student experience have students involved as project consultants or Advisory Group members.
- Professor Carl Lygo, V C, B P P University which has a Chief Executive of Students who is a former B P P University student employed to help improve the overall student experience and to represent the interests of students to the institution.

It is proposed that the event will be followed by a workshop involving the project team and a number of the expert speakers, to discuss the initiatives on display and about how these might translate in an Open University context.

10. The Project Group is working towards firm proposals to be put before Senate about how student engagement could be integrated into Open University strategy and fed into business plans. It is also expected that students will be consulted at some stage using the OU’s consultative process.

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