OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES (SARs) REPORTS FOR REGIONS & NATIONS

C E C is asked to:

i) receive the reports

ii) note that unless this paper is starred for discussion prior to the meeting, printed copies will not be supplied

Reports submitted by:-

S A R for South & South West
S A R for Wales
S A R for Scotland
S A R for Northern Ireland
S A R for Northern Europe
S A R for Southern Europe
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR THE SOUTH & SOUTH WEST

Student Consultation Meetings

Since the last C E C meeting, I attended the OU South Student Consultative meeting in Oxford (alongside Peter Cowan, V P Educational Support and Research). I still have to attend the South West consultative meeting in Bristol to attend this coming weekend (20 June 2015).

We discussed possible improvements to OU Live, to make it more user friendly, including a “How To” video to help students with the basics and a short guide for all new students.

We also discussed how students felt that A Ls/Tutors could do more to improve attendance and engagement with group tuition, including proper planning, sending material out in advance, holding more local tutorials (if possible), or all-day schools, which would make a longer/more costly journey worthwhile for students to attend. Students should have a greater choice of face-to-face tutorials to attend, which allows for more flexibility. An online alternative should always be offered to students who may be unable to attend face-to-face tutorials for various reasons.

Many students also felt that the OU needs to move into the 21st Century, and as well as providing more interactive materials for students on modules which are online only, we could make use of social media (Facebook, Twitter) to hold tutorials and other learning events for students who are unable to attend in person, holding more informal OU Live events and encouraging students to discuss, collaborate and exchange ideas.

Students would like to see a wider choice of formats to use in their studies, many now access their materials in a number of ways, including using kindles (although, this could be improved), P D Fs, audio recordings, i-books, and of course, the traditional text books. Possible alternative formats suggested include, an OU app (there is a current app available, OUAnywhere, but it may be difficult to load larger files onto some mobile phones), audio journals from the OU library, M P 3 files which are considered very useful for revision, and of course, P D Fs which should be available to all students.

While Mac users now find it easier to study with OU materials, there are still issues where some instructions are provided by module teams which don’t reflect up to date software that is now available (I would like to know when they bring out something that will be compatible with Linux, but there we go!).

We also discussed potential barriers to student engagement, and how they might be overcome, for example, how might transitional students complete their studies before
those arrangements end, and how could the OU help those students who are, for whatever reason, unable to meet the deadline (and inconsistencies, such as the transitional arrangement ending 2 years before the completion deadline for those studying for an Open Degree). Students have expressed a desire to be “kept in the loop” with various changes and developments within the University, and offered the chance to give regular feedback, in order to further improve the student experience.

**Student Engagement**

Between myself and other C E C/Assembly members, we have held a series of themed weekends on social media (Facebook, Twitter), with the intent of promoting OUSA while encouraging students to interact. While we have had some success with the promotion so far, we could improve things by more advance planning and publicity, which can be discussed at the next C E C meeting, if there's time.

I have also spoken to students on the OUSA forums, and suggested holding more coffee mornings in the South West region at some point in the summer, for which there has been some interest (watch this space).

*Claire Lannigan*

*Student Association Representative for the South and South-West*
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR WALES

Wales Assembly Executive and Members

Since the last report I have continued to support the chair of the Assembly to co-ordinate Assembly meetings. The Assembly meeting was held in May with a face to face meeting on 23 May while the online meeting was open from 16 until 30 May. Unfortunately the turn out for the face to face meetings remains low. A different approach was taken for this meeting - a formal meeting followed by a social. The date of the next meeting is still to be confirmed but it is hoped that we will meet during July, possibly in West Wales, and follow the same format of the formal meeting followed by a social.

The Assembly is continuing to try and pin down a structure combining the previous terms of reference into one document that will be inclusive of the Assembly and Executive. There is a feeling that the formality of the Assembly needs to be softened to attract new members and that it would be ideal to encourage greater discussion of student issues with the aim of improving turn out at meetings.

Social Meetings/Groups/Activities

The Bluestone social group continues to meet on the first Thursday of the month in Haverfordwest Cricket Club. We are looking to start having more regular social groups in Cardiff as well as Neath Port Talbot following on from previous successes.

Members of the Assembly were invited to meet the new Vice Chancellor (V C), Peter Horrocks, when he visited the OU in Wales offices on 15 May. Myself and three members of the Assembly attended and shared our experience as OU students. The V C was keen to know how we came to be studying at the OU and challenges we had faced. It was an opportunity for us to raise issues including I D requirements for exams and concerns around online only study.

The Cardiff Degree Ceremony was held on 12 June and members of the Assembly and Executive were able to take part in the procession as well as man the OUSA stall. We were grateful for help from the office for volunteers to step in last minute and help out. Two students from Wales volunteered at short notice on what was a very busy day.

Social Media

The OUSA Wales Assembly Facebook Group now has 270 members. We hope to continue to engage with more students this way and are looking into improving our use of other social media channels such as Twitter and Instagram.
I continue to be present in the regional Virtual Learning Environment (V L E) Forums where I have been answering queries and offering support.

**Consultative Process/Meetings**

A consultative meeting has not taken place in Wales yet and is now likely to be postponed until September. As this meeting took place in Cardiff last year there is enthusiasm to have the meeting in North Wales. This would be excellent for OUSA as there has been little engagement with students in North Wales and it would be great to exploit any opportunity. It has been suggested that as well as the consultative meeting this should be a larger open day event for new students.

**Other Updates**

On the last weekend in June I will be attending an Associate Lectures Conference hosted by the OU in Wales along with a member of the Assembly Executive.

**Activities since last C E C meeting**

- **15 May** Meeting with VC Peter Horrocks in the OU in Wales
- **23 May** Assembly meeting
- **10 June** Senate Reference Group (S R G) and Senate
- **12 June** Cardiff Degree Ceremony

**Future Commitments**

- **27 – 28 June** OU in Wales AL Development Conference, Llandrindod Wells
- **July (date TBC)** Assembly meeting
- **September (date TBC)** Consultative meeting and open day event, Wrexham

*Claire Smith*

*Student Association Representative for Wales*
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR SCOTLAND

This report will cover both my activities and those of OUSA in Scotland since my last report to the C E C in March.

Scottish Assembly

The OUSA Scotland Assembly met in Edinburgh in April and discussed a variety of topics. A review of the Assembly/Executive seminar was discussed during the morning portion of the meeting in the form of a workshop, with those Assembly members who attended the seminar giving their feedback on the event and a summary created which has been posted into the OUSA Scotland Assembly meetings for the benefit of those who were unable to attend. On the whole it was felt that the event was a positive one and will help in the running of the Assembly.

Other topics discussed were the ongoing planning of the OUSA in Scotland Open Day (a summary of the day will be covered later in this report); recruitment and publicity of student representation for the O U in Scotland Scottish Committee taking place in Edinburgh; matters relating to the new style newsletters which incorporate the recently refreshed OUSA branding and the need to retain flexibility and individuality; the OUSA Scotland Student Feedback forum which is ongoing - this allows students in Scotland to offer their opinions on a range of topics affecting students in Scotland and what future topics students may wish to discuss, one such suggestion was to ask “what can O U S A in Scotland do for you?”. Open Day related questions on the areas that we intend to cover during the event were also suggested - those areas relating to finance, courses, the internet access to H E, help/Student Support. Specific issues related to finance were around Part Time funding and the anomaly of a 119 credit student being able to get support under the Part Time Fee Grant with a 120 credit student not being able to do so as this is classed as full time, but also the potential for 10/15 credit courses to return in the future.

The next meeting of the Scottish Assembly is scheduled to take place in August.

OUSA In Scotland Open Day

This event was held in early June at Glasgow Caledonian University and follows on from the successful Part Time Conference which we held in June 2013. We were delighted to be joined by V P Education Policy on the day (unfortunately travel problems prevented V P Representation from also joining us as had been originally planned). Despite the weather conditions in Glasgow on the day we did get a steady stream of students coming along to take part. We were joined in the morning part of the day by Jim Miller, Director of the O U in Scotland, to give his thoughts on
changes in the O U during his time in his current role and took questions from students on a range of issues such as tutorials, funding and online delivery.

Other elements of the event included presentations on comparing the findings from our 2012 Online Delivery Survey and the issues that students in 2015 have with various elements of online delivery, more specifically, StudentHome (summarising some of the discussions held on the ongoing OUSA in Scotland Student Feedback Forum), and information on finance, careers and module choice as examples with module materials made available for students to have a look at to illustrate changes in modules throughout the period of the O U. We also provided information on societies/groups and student engagement as OUSA based activities. A demonstration on StudentHome was also provided which proved useful to those attending. It was interesting to note that many of the issues that students in Scotland experience today are broadly similar to those identified in the 2012 survey and issues that still need to be solved, such as navigation of StudentHome as an example. It is hoped that our next event will take place during the next non-OUSA Conference year in 2017.

My thanks go to the OUSA Scottish Executive for their hard work in planning the event and the running on the day, to George MacFarlane for again giving up his time and giving a demonstration of StudentHome to those attending and to V P Education Policy for also attending on the day.

Graduation Ceremonies

OUSA in Scotland once again were present at the OU Graduation Ceremonies being held in the Usher Hall, Edinburgh in May. I would like to thank George MacFarlane for agreeing to be our Ceremony Co-ordinator as he has kindly done for the last few ceremonies which we have been present at. A number of new volunteers helped out at the merchandise stall on the day and it is hoped that we will retain interest from those volunteers not only for the upcoming ceremonies in late October, but beyond and hopefully be in a position to take on the co-ordinator role in the future. In the region of £2,000 was made on the stall on the day and feedback on the new merchandise range has been very positive in terms of its' smarter look and being a range that is more appealing.

We will be present again at the autumn ceremonies in Edinburgh taking place in late October.

Scottish Committee

The annual Consultative meeting of the OU in Scotland (O U I S), Scottish Committee took place in Edinburgh in mid-June. I liaised with the OUSA Office on support in organising student representation in the run up to the meeting in addition to the methods by which we have promoted the opportunity to attend the meeting in the past. At the close of applications for expressions of interest, including those nominated by the Assembly/Executive, a total of 17 students were registered to attend which was a positive step forward from the very small number we had for last year's meeting.

In between the close of the recruitment period and the meeting, a few students could no longer attend for various reasons so approximately 12 students attended. The
changes we have made to how we recruit students for the meeting and the O U I S allowing us to suggest a consultation topic have been positive changes and the offer of an OUSA only portion was made also for this year, however that was tagged on to the end of the meeting itself and we felt that this would be too much of a day in terms of time commitment to ask of students, however this will be revisited for future years as being part of the “main body” of the meeting.

The consultation topics discussed in the new format morning session were group tuition co-led by myself and Ruth Tudor, OUSA President, student engagement in curriculum design and online/on-screen learning. These sessions allowed views to be given on the consultation topics and areas flagged up included issues with online/on-screen learning such as those students in rural areas suffer from weak broadband coverage, competencies in using the OU Live system - both on the part of Associate Lecturers and students flagging up the mode of study delivery at the point of student registration and accessibility and usability. In respect of student engagement in curriculum design, amongst issues raised were those on module evaluation and end of module surveys and feedback is raised, and used, within the university governance structure. With respect to group tuition, issues were raised on how to engage students via other means than face to face tutorials and how those means could be more rigidly enforced.

The business portion of the meeting outlined the O U I S' Communications Strategy including the promotional aspects of that strategy and improvements to the Scotland part of the O U website; an update on the Locations Analysis project and what it could mean in Scotland; an update on student recruitment which indicated an increase in Full Time Equivalent (F T E) student numbers, but a decrease in the overall student headcount. Information was also provided on an updated Complaints and Appeals procedure which comes into effect from August 1st.

The meeting concluded by recognising the outgoing Director, Scotland, Jim Miller for his work with the O U in Scotland over his tenure. He moves on to take up a new post at Glasgow Caledonian University in the autumn and we wish him well. We hope that the problems we had also with not being able to provide meaningful feedback into the consultative process review have been alleviated this year, and we would also like to thank the OUSA office for both providing us support in the run up to the meeting, but to Anna Vickerson, Communications Officer in the OUSA office for joining us on the day and hope that the feedback gained on the day is able to provide a better understanding of the consultative process in the Nations.

Finally, the O U in Scotland changed the format of the meeting and the numbers of students allowed to attend from 18 students previously to 20 students. It was a concern that on both aspects, we were not informed until the call for student representation went out for the meeting, which was then raised in our report to the meeting, an agenda item that we have. The format for the morning session, which has previously been a themed discussion on a topic of the University's choosing was changed to reflect the process followed in the regions, and we were afforded a chance to agree a consultation topic with the O U I S after suggestions and comments from students, that topic was agreed to be on tutorial provision.

Events
We were pleased to be invited to meet with the new Vice Chancellor of the Open University, along with the Director, Students in Edinburgh at the end of May. Myself and OUSA Scottish Executive Member, Ian Cheyne, attended this meeting. We were able to give not only our experiences as students, but also suggest ways in which the University could make the student experience better for students in Scotland.

Reps also attended a national conference held by Sparqs, which they were undertaking for the first time at Heriot Watt University in Edinburgh. For those attending from outside of the UK, an extra day of activities was held at the Sparqs offices across the city. The conference showed the level of student engagement taking place across college and university institutions worldwide. Amongst the keynote speeches, other speeches were given by Eve Lewis, Head of Sparqs and Professor Alice Brown, Chair of the Scottish Funding Council. Areas discussed also included widening access, the SFC framework, outcome agreements (which the SFC agrees with institutions in Scotland including the OU), and Quality Enhancement.

Another interesting keynote speech was given by Professor Mary Stuart, Vice Chancellor, and Dan Derricott, Student Engagement Manager of the University of Lincoln on how the University has changed in order to develop a partnership of culture with their students as well as institution wide changes in culture, empowering staff to engage students and that working in partnership with them enabled them to give their students a better learning experience. The university have an Executive Board, with every Executive member being paired up with a student, allowing them to develop a perspective of what happens behind the scenes, and to find out about each other. They also support student reps to participate and allow students to be involved in recruiting staff.

One particular workshop held which our rep attended was on engaging students to embed diversity and equality in the curriculum, which looked at case studies of student led projects. Presentation sessions included a session on how to enhance representation led by Queen Margaret University (QMU) and University of the West of Scotland (UWS) in which QMU aimed to show how their student rep assistant position was successful in enhancing representation, being a development of Sparqs' Institutional Associate Trainers' Scheme.

The Conference concluded with a Student Engagement Awards reception, recognising colleges, universities and their students for work undertaken in areas such as the most effective course rep in a college/university.

The biennial QAA Enhancement Themes International Conference took place again at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Glasgow in June. The current theme as I have mentioned in previous CEC reports is Transitions, and this formed a key part of the three day event. Keynote speeches were given throughout the event interspersed with parallel “breakout” sessions, presentations and poster displays. The opening keynote speech of the Conference was given by Professor Sally Kift, Deputy Vice Chancellor, James Cook University, Australia on Transition Pedagogy; A whole Student, whole of institution framework for successful student transitions.

Keynote speeches were also given by the current Scottish Government cabinet secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Angela Constance MSP, on the
future of enhancement and innovation in HE, and a student panel session led by the broadcaster, Muriel Gray. A plenary session on the first year of the theme also took place at the conference. As well as a plenary session on the Enhancement Theme Student Network and how it operates and is linked to the work of the Themes. The network is made up of at least one student representative from each of the 19 Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, a group leader and a member of university staff, to discuss the challenges and issues faced with relation to the Themes. At the present time, the Network is currently working on two areas with relation to the current Transitions theme, which are the non-traditional student experience and Postgraduate Transitions. The next Enhancement Themes Conference will be held in Edinburgh, in June of next year.

Activities since last meeting

19 April – 3 May  OUSA Scotland Assembly meeting (online)
25 April  OUSA Scotland Assembly meeting (face to face), Edinburgh
29 May  Vice Chancellor’s Visit, Edinburgh
3 June  Appointments Committee Meeting, Milton Keynes
6 June  OUSA in Scotland Open Day, “Transitions”, Glasgow
13 June  OU in Scotland Scottish Committee, Edinburgh

Future Diary Dates

24 - 26 July  Central Representatives Training, Milton Keynes
22 August  OUSA Scotland Assembly meeting, Glasgow
7 October  OU in Scotland Scottish Working Committee, Edinburgh
13 - 15 November  C E C Meeting, Milton Keynes

Mark Cameron
OUSA Student Association Representative for Scotland
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Since my last report I have been in regular contact with Assembly Members.

Dave Milliken was appointed to the Senate Reference Group (S R G) and has attended the April and June S R G meetings.

I met with the Nightline Ambassador for Northern Ireland (N I) to discuss ways to promote the nightline service.

An Assembly meeting with John D’Arcy, Director of the Open University in Ireland was arranged but unfortunately John cancelled, owing to commitments in Milton Keynes.

The N I Assembly meeting opened online on 13 June and is ongoing. The face to face element of the meeting is being held on Sat 27 June, OU Office, Belfast. If members wish to attend they can R S V P to ousa-sar-nireland@open.ac.uk.

The Student Consultative Meeting took place in Dublin and was well attended. Students enjoyed the opportunity to attend the OUSA meeting after the consultation.

Activities since last C E C meeting

8 April Meeting with OU Nightline Ambassador in N I (Belfast)
20 April Locations Analysis Pre Senate Presentation (Milton Keynes)
22 April Senate Reference Group (Milton Keynes)
23 April Charter Day Address (Milton Keynes)
23 April Learn About Fair (Milton Keynes)
29 April Q A A Meeting (Milton Keynes)
11 May N I Assembly meeting with John D’Arcy (cancelled by OU)
12 May Council Lunch (Milton Keynes)
16 May Student Consultation (Dublin)
20 May Q A A Meeting (Online)
10 June Senate Reference Group (Milton Keynes)
10 June Senate Reference Group Annual Effectiveness Review
11 June OUSA Engagement Strategy Project Meeting (Milton Keynes)
13 June Student Consultation (Manchester)
13 June OUSA N I Assembly Online Meeting (ongoing until 26 June)
16 June Q A A Meeting (Milton Keynes) (cancelled by OUSA)

I have also participated in online discussions for the OUSA Societies Project working group.
**Future Commitments**

27 June       N I Assembly Meeting (face to face)
24 – 26 July  Central Rep Training
13 – 15 Nov   C E C
18 – 20 March 16  C E C
22 – 24 July 2016  C E C

*Nicola Simpson*

*Student Association Representative for Northern Ireland*
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR NORTHERN EUROPE

Northern Europe Assembly Executive

The election of the new members has not changed any communication within the Assembly. I will need to find a way encouraging the members and I am planning a Live-Session after the summer period.

Social Meetings/Groups/Activities

The last network meeting has been cancelled as student registered for the session. I am thinking about trying another summer session after the vacation period in the area of Düsseldorf/Cologne.

Social Media

Facebook has been cleaned up whereas it was not possible to change the status to an open group due the rules of Facebook. The group itself is quiet but people apply to become a group member regularly which I am accepting. No application has been rejected.

Other Updates

I am in touch with Poker-Stars to see whether an online poker session can be created for students in the N E region. This will be an online weekend fun activity.

Future Commitments

3 – 5 July  C E C meeting
Until 21 June  Online International Student Consultative Meeting

Christian Klein
Student Association Representative for Northern Europe
Central Executive Committee (C E C)
3 – 5 July 2015

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (S A R) FOR SOUTHERN EUROPE

The OUSA V L E forums have been relatively quiet as usual.

Facebook group members: S.Europe 234; Greece 166; France 135; Spain 232; Italy 90; SA Switzerland 184.

All Facebook groups have been relatively quiet with the exception of some posts about degree recognition issues at the Greek group. Cover photo pages with OUSA’s new logo have been created for all Facebook groups. Southern Europe S A R still doesn’t have administrative rights for Switzerland group, thus the logo was simply posted at the thread.

OUSA Southern Europe has a new twitter account with 22 followers and 41 tweets: @OUSA_SEurope. OUSA’s new twitter logo and profile picture for Southern Europe have been used for this account.

The Southern Europe S A R has permissions as Forum Moderator in all Southern Europe forums as well as at “OUSa Moderators” forum.

OUSA Southern Europe Executive Assembly has a newly elected member as result of the bye elections: Brigitte Audeoud. An Executive Assembly member expressed interest in becoming Finance Officer at the last Assembly Executives Seminar.

Tasks and responsibilities have to be newly distributed and discussed within the new Assembly. The previous efforts to set up a live meeting for the Southern Europe Executive Assembly were without success. There will be a new effort just after the C E C meeting; however a closed group at OUSA’s forums for Southern Europe’s Executive Assembly Members might contribute overcoming difficulties with communication.

Activities since the last C E C meeting

25 March 2015 Discussed via skype with V P Representation and Northern Europe S A R to produce a list of topics for the full International Students’ Online Consultative Meeting in June.

20 May Q A A Project Team meeting
15 - 21 June International Students’ Online Consultative Meeting

Future Commitments

September 2015 Athens face to face meeting.
July – September (TBC) Southern Europe Blackboard live online meeting.
Michail Kasoutas
Student Association Representative for Southern Europe