OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
22 – 24 January 2016

REDESIGNING STUDENT SUPPORT FOR THE NEW WORLD

The CEC is asked to:

i) receive a presentation from Pat Atkins, Acting Director, Student Support, Academic Services

A new Student Journey and an Operating Model to deliver it

At the heart of the OU’s mission is a focus on supporting students achieve their study goals through offering coherent and supported routes to qualifications – alongside a modules based offer.

We know that for many students this is a positive and satisfying experience:

- Overall 89% of New Students stated that they were satisfied with their study experience & 86% of New Students stated modules met expectations;

- 94% or more of New Students were satisfied with induction resources they used from StudentHome and qualification websites;

- 87% of respondents to the New Student Survey felt that good information and advice was made available to make initial study choices.

However, for a significant minority our systems, processes and ways of working are not so positive.
Examples include of feedback from students includes:

“I’ve had emails where it isn’t always obvious whether I need to take action.”

“I called them (SRF) to get more information on timescales, module duration and so on because I found that the website was a bit vague”

“Generally not enough interaction. Feel detached”

“I personally would of liked a lot more time speaking to tutors prior to the course starting to get a real feel of what it would involve”

“I didn't enrol for the next module, and I haven't heard a ‘dicky bird' from the OU. It's like I've fallen off of the face of the earth!”

“I did not hand in an assignment, I had nobody who contacted me, there is no support”

These examples illustrate the dissatisfaction that leads to many students changing their study intentions and in some cases withdrawing from study altogether. Manifesting itself in low levels of degree completion and module completion rates that could be improved. Drawing upon feedback from students, research into why students withdraw and the experience of staff from across the OU it is clear that we need to change how we think about the Student Journey. Building our systems, processes and ways of working around a cyclical journey towards a goal that is greater than the completion of a single module will enable a better service to be delivered to all students.
Achieving this requires us to change. This will be undertaken within context of the transition into the restructured locations agreed by Council but the aim and ambition of the new journey is greater.

For the student this will mean:

- An improved website that they can navigate intuitively to find the right information to link their end goal with our study offering;
- Information and advice available through a range of channels that positively state the approach taken by most successful students, to help others be successful;
- Support provided at times convenient to them, via channels (telephone, webchat, email) convenient to them to ensure issues and problems are addressed quickly – recognising that for many a phone call or a web chat is more effective than an email;
- Being able to benefit from early study planning and pre-registration on future modules that take them towards their study goal;
- Development of support for students in relation to their progression between modules and towards their study goal;
- New processes to ensure students have selected the most appropriate module for their overall study goal – reducing the need to change once the module has started;
- A clearer expectation of what studying with the OU really means – to manage their expectations from the outset.

Delivering the new Journey demands a new Operating Model, built around the concept of a coherent service, designed to have a student focused culture, unified processes and end to end KPIs and targets. The model will be built upon the credibility which the current Student Recruitment and Fees (SRF) and Student Support Team (SST) model already has by building out from a principle of partnership - recognising an Operational component and an Academic Support component. The key change will be that in the new model the leadership of these two components will be jointly responsible and accountable. They will work in partnership with Faculties and Marketing for the delivery of a consistent service to students in England and the Nations.

This partnership will come together in each location in the form of a **Student Recruitment and Support Centre**. One coherent service working across organisational boundaries to deliver a seamless experience to students and potential students. When fully implemented the Operating Model will be able to deliver – as tasked when the SSJ Programme was established:

- Improved student outcomes both in terms of module completion rates and qualification degree completion rates;
- Improved student experience as measured by student satisfaction with the service provided;
Financial benefits in relation to efficiency or effectiveness that can be reinvested; and offering/delivering greater value to our students and in turn more students coming to the OU

Delivery of good practice through the elimination of non-value adding inconsistencies.

Delivering this level of ambition will take time before students and the OU can fully realise all the benefits. However, we believe it will be possible by August 2017 to start to see the following benefits for students:

**Improved services:**
- Extended opening hours – 08:00-20:00 Mon to Fri and 09:00-17:00 Sat;
- Simplified access to services, routed via sophisticated systems to the members of staff most appropriate to deal with the contact request.

**Improved support:**
- Increasing the level of curriculum knowledge available to prospective students, without reducing the level of support provided to existing students;
- New processes to proactively support new students in selecting their modules and getting ready for study.

**Greater consistency**
- Irrespective of area of study or Nation affiliation students should and can expect excellent service and support consistently delivered.
- Improved levels of service through the application of consistent processes.

Building a new coherent service requires drawing on the core strengths of the existing SRF and SST services to develop a single set of underpinning beliefs and values that together form a strong positive working culture. These include a service that will:

- Embed at its core a Student centric approach;
- Ensure there is a positive culture where staff are valued, developed and challenged in an environment of mutual respect;
- Continue to improve and innovate, ensuring the service meets and exceeds student expectations;
- Recognise the importance of Staff development (both skills and knowledge) - activities and opportunities will be regular and ongoing as part of a wider approach to career progression;
- Draw on professional contact centre processes and methodology to optimise the service provided to students;
- A service that understands and is built around the importance of specialisms.

**Pat Atkins**  
*Acting Director, Student Support, Academic Services*