UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE EXECUTIVE

Review of Student Consultative Mechanisms

This paper is the report of the annual effectiveness review of the student consultative mechanisms.

The Executive is asked to approve the recommendations made and changes to the Terms of Reference for the mechanisms that make up the Student Consultative Structure.

The Open University
Student Consultative Mechanisms: Annual Effectiveness Review 2016

‘As members of a collaborative community, we consult with members, encourage participation and welcome constructive feedback to enhance the student experience.’ – The Student Charter

1. Introduction

The Open University is committed to effective student engagement, and its student consultative mechanisms consist of online forums and face-to-face meetings, through which the OU consults students on a range of issues that may affect them.

The Student Consultation Office (SConsO) is required to produce an annual effectiveness review of the Open University’s student consultative process on behalf of the University Students Consultative Executive (USCE). The period covered by this report is June 2015 to May 2016 (inclusive).

The report will be considered by the University Students Consultative Executive (USCE). It will also be considered by the Student Experience Committee, acting as the touch point between the student consultative process and University governance.

2. Summary

This report evaluates available data about the current operations of the student consultative mechanisms, and, taking into account significant changes in the University’s structure, makes recommendations for improving the student consultative mechanisms for the consultation year starting on 1 September 2016.

Data evaluated included a series of surveys of staff and students and desk research into the functioning of the forums and students involved. Limited conclusions should be drawn from survey data where response rates were not high. The review paid particular attention to:
a. the face-to-face student consultative meetings where significant changes to their organisation are needed in light of the planned closure of most English locations; and
b. the Student Support Team Consultative Forums, which have not met the success criteria for student consultation and needed to be reviewed in light of changes to the OU’s faculty structure.

Some key messages are as follows:

- Results of the General Student Survey (GSS) indicate that awareness of the online student consultative mechanisms has increased significantly since the previous report. Only 20% of students responding to the 14/15 GSS were aware of the consultative forums; this has risen to 75% in 15/16. Awareness that students have a voice through the University Governance structures has risen from 49% to 75%, while the number of students who ‘wouldn’t know where to start’ if they wanted to comment on an aspect of the student experience has fallen from 44% in 14/15 to just 7% in 15/16. In response to the question ‘what are the reasons you have volunteered or would like to volunteer?’ (where students could select more than one option), 64% selected ‘I enjoy sharing my experience of OU study’, 47% selected ‘I want my voice to be heard so that I can help improve how the OU works’, 64% ‘I like feeling part of the OU community’ and 25% selected ‘It is an extra-curricular activity that looks good on my CV’.

- The overall survey results, although complex, are on average positive, with both students and staff generally having a positive overall impression of student consultation and where relevant agreeing that it has improved since last year.

- Although the number of students who have heard about how the outputs from student consultation influence University decision making has increased significantly from 5% in 14/15 to 32% in 15/16, there is still room for improvement, particularly in relation to increasing the number and diversity of students involved in consultation; communicating to students and staff the value of consultation; and improving the impact of student consultation, reporting back to students in a timely fashion the impact their feedback has had.

These issues are explored further in the report and recommendations for improvement are included as Appendix 1 with new terms of reference for relevant bodies included as appendix 3.

Response rates for the surveys used in the report below are as follows:

- All student volunteers: 210 (16.3%);
- All staff involved in the consultative process: 75 (42.3%);
- Staff not directly involved in the consultative process: 24 (no corresponding percentage is available as this survey was available to all staff via the intranet);
- Students who attended the F2F meetings: 104 (54%);
- Students who were allocated a place at F2F meetings but did not attend: 14 (5.8%);
- General Student Survey: 106 (5.3%).
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4. Context

When the new student consultative process was introduced in 2013 it was agreed that it should be the subject of an annual effectiveness review. The wider context within the higher education sector is that ‘the effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed at least annually, using pre-defined key performance indicators, and policies and processes are enhanced where required’ (UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B5). The University’s student consultative process was last reviewed in April 2015 by the external company SUMS Consulting, operating under the following instructions: ‘to review the effectiveness of the structures and process for student consultation and bring forward proposals for continuous improvement’. For 2015/16 the review has been brought in house, and carried out by a sub-group of the University Students Consultative Executive (USCE), supplemented by IET and Faculty representation.

5. Objectives

The objectives of student consultation are:

- To provide an opportunity for students to influence the direction of change;
- Where students do not have the ability to influence the direction of change, to provide an opportunity for students to influence the implementation of change;
- To provide students with a mechanism to identify opportunities for change;
- For students to be a part of the vibrant OU community;
- For students to have the opportunity to make a difference, by offering insight and helping the University to find solutions and develop new, innovative ideas;
- To enable students to enhance their employability, gaining experience and developing skills that will give an advantage when competing for employment opportunities.

The objective of this review is:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the consultative process and make any appropriate recommendations for improvement.

The criteria for effectiveness of the structure are:

- The process is sufficiently flexible to allow timely consultation, such that the views of students are considered on appropriate issues before decisions are made, rather than simply being informed afterwards.
- The process allows the student body to have an effective voice outside and in addition to the governance processes on which students have a voice by right.
- The process facilitates compliance with the commitments made in the Student Charter, with the requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Chapter B5 Student Engagement) and with the OU-OU Students Association Relationship Agreement.
- The process allows greater opportunity for students to raise issues for consultation and responses from the University than the previous system offered.
- That agenda setting mechanisms work effectively both for students and the University.
Student consultative processes engage a wide and diverse spectrum of student views, including individual voices as well as student representatives.

Mechanisms are in place to enable the engagement of students with additional requirements in consultative processes.

That the appropriate level of University staff engagement is achieved, from senior managers of the University, strategic and operational staff, academic, academic-related and Associate Lecturer staff.

The University is transparent in its reaction to the outputs and outcomes of student consultation to complete feedback loops: ‘Students told us X and the University did Y’. The University responses include an explanation as to why a proposal needs to be modified or will not be actioned as appropriate.

That discussion with students should, where possible, be evidence-based.

That mechanisms for student consultation should not be used for students to raise personal concerns or complaints and that these should be very clearly signposted elsewhere, for example to the student complaint process.

6. Methodology

The methodology for this report was to establish recommendations for improvement based on results from surveys and staff, desk research, and meetings of the USCE sub-group.

A recommendation provided by SUMS was to conduct a survey of volunteers each year to understand their experiences of the process. Average responses should be calculated, with the process aiming for an average response rating of 4 or above on the scale of 1-5, indicating that on average volunteers agree with the statements which make up the bases for effectiveness.

This recommendation has been implemented and the following groups were surveyed (via Survey Monkey):

- All student volunteers;
- All staff involved in the consultative process;
- Staff not directly involved in the consultative process;
- Students who attended the F2F meetings;
- Students who were allocated a place at F2F meetings but did not attend.

A General Student Survey about student engagement was also sent out to a demographically selected group of 2,000 students, via IET; 106 (5.3%) responded.

Results from all of the surveys above are presented in the body of the report below, as most appropriate.

NB: Where average accordance ‘ratings’ are given, these are always on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree. Percentages and ratings are rounded to the nearest decimal place. Where average data is provided in the report, this is always the mean of the data set (with the exception of average ratings which are calculated on using a weighted average).
7. University Students Consultative Forum

The University Students Consultative Forum (USCF) seeks and considers views of UK and international, undergraduate and postgraduate students on matters affecting their study and student experience. It is made up of around 120 student volunteers as well as around 50 OUSA representatives. Staff, including tutors, are 'in attendance' to respond to any comments.

72 students involved in the USCF responded to the student volunteer survey. All references to student feedback below are from these students unless otherwise stated.

7.1 Inputs

7.1.1 Scheduling

In the period February 2014 to February 2015, 13 consultations were run in the University Students Consultative Forum (USCF) which equates to an average of 1 consultation per calendar month. There was little or no break between 5 sets of consultations and consultations were roughly 2 weeks long, with the shortest consultation lasting 13 days, and the longest lasting 34 days.

In the period June 2015 to May 2016, the following 14 consultations were run in the USCF:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length (days)</th>
<th>Gap days following</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locations Analysis</td>
<td>20 May – 3 June 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student communications</td>
<td>8-22 June 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of financial information to students</td>
<td>15-28 Sept 15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and strategy for Library Services</td>
<td>13-27 Oct 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUSA’s regional structure in England</td>
<td>4-18 Nov 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single point of contact throughout your studies</td>
<td>7-21 Dec 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>11-25 Jan 16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the OU’s strategic direction</td>
<td>26 Jan – 8 Feb 16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering OU study</td>
<td>9-21 Feb 16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student Charter</td>
<td>1-14 March 16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic freedom policy</td>
<td>8-20 April 16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Recruitment and Support Centre Training</td>
<td>14-27 April 16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and Onscreen Learning</td>
<td>22 April - 8 May 16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment of OUSA President and Deputy President</td>
<td>18-30 May 16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that the length of consultations was consistently around 2 weeks, with no gap between 4 sets of consultations. Scheduling during 2015-16 also took into greater account than previously the main holiday period of July and August, during which months no consultations were scheduled.

63% of students who responded to the volunteer survey felt that the length of consultation was about right, while 33% felt that they were a bit too short and 4% that they were far too short. Student comments on this issue include:
Consultations follow their own schedule, are announced and opened at short notice, and the forums close quickly, but students are already committed to their own study planning with deadlines for assignments, etc. Forums should be open longer.  
Have consultations during the summer break so we don’t have studying and essays etc.  
I would make the consultations window a bit longer.

The average of one 2 week consultation per month over the year remains an intensive schedule for a single group of students, and expectations of individual involvement are therefore high, although students are advised that they are not expected to contribute to every consultation. The previous SUMS report advised that this can result in student volunteers experiencing ‘forum fatigue’, and has a negative impact on engagement and by extension the quality of consultation responses (either on a singular level, as an individual student may not have time to provide detailed and considered responses; and/or on a collective level, as a reduction in the number of posts/students posting will inevitably provide a less representative and therefore less robust outcome).

However, only 10% of volunteers who responded to the survey felt that there had been ‘a few too many’ consultations since September 15, while 63% felt that there had been about the right amount, 22% felt that there had been ‘not quite enough’ and 6% that there had been ‘not nearly enough’. One student commented that there should not be any overlapping consultations, but a greater number of students commented that the forums should be open for longer (see above); 52% of students said that the consultations being open for longer would have made them more likely to participate, while 48% said this wasn’t an issue.

Recommendation USCF-1: The pool of student volunteers should be doubled to 200, and should reflect the current student profile in relation to age, qualification level, nation and subject area and to be over-represented in relation to widening access criteria students and ‘new regime’ students.

Recommendation USCF-2: There should be a trial and evaluation of at least one bespoke consultation which would not call on the existing student volunteers but recruit either from the student body as a whole or from the segment of the student body appropriate to the consultation topic.

Recommendation USCF-3: There should be a trial to lengthen a small number of consultations to 3 weeks, with this to be extended if the impact is a significant increase in participation.

A recommendation made in the previous review was for the Student Consultation Office (SConsO) to draw up a schedule of consultation at least three months in advance to allow students to plan their contributions, with the expectation that this would increase engagement in the forums. However, this recommendation has not been fully implemented as this does not fit with how many areas of the University currently use the consultative process. Advanced notice of forthcoming consultations is given as early as possible on the VLE site and the statement that ‘Information about the consultation is provided at the right time’ had an approval rating of 3.7 so it is proposed to continue with current practice with regard to scheduling, giving students as much notice as possible while retaining flexibility.

7.1.2 Topics
The previous report made the recommendation to embed stakeholder consultation in change initiatives, with the expected outcome that consultation would happen at the appropriate time in the project lifecycle and outputs would be available to influence decisions. Action has been taken to improve the awareness of staff about the benefits of student consultation: student consultation is already included in OU project management templates and staff communications (including a video) have been produced encouraging staff to use the consultation process. 71% of staff who responded to the survey for ‘staff not directly involved in the consultation process’ stated that they were aware that it existed; during the 2015/16 consultation cycle the profile of student consultation has been sufficient to the extent that there has been student consultation at an appropriate point in major student-facing projects taking place within the University. However, ongoing staff communications are needed to maintain and increase the profile and awareness of the benefits of student consultation.

**Recommendation USCF-4**: Student involvement in University projects that affect the student experience should be mandatory (via at least one of the following options: students as project team members; forum consultation; student survey or focus group/workshop). The OU project management delivery methodology should be amended to reflect this.

All Open University staff have access to a template located on the intranet which can be used to propose a topic for consultation. Completed templates are reviewed and signed off by SConsO and the University Students Consultative Executive (USCE). The previous review put forward a recommendation to ensure that initiators understand the benefits of consultation to their project and articulate their objectives for consultation; the anticipated impact of this was to increase the likelihood that the appropriate mechanism is chosen for consultation, thus increasing quality of outputs. SConsO has actioned this recommendation, and the guidance and template for consultation initiators has been updated and improved several times during the year, with additional resources made available including an updated template for responses. All applicable resources are available on the Academic Services intranet and via the A-Z on OU Life.

The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average rating of 4.2 to the question ‘I was able to access the information and advice I needed to plan the consultation’; therefore it can be concluded that these actions have been successful.

A further recommendation from the previous review was to commit to taking forward a number of student initiated topics on both the USCF and Student Support Team (SST) consultative forums, with the expectation that this would increase engagement and compliance with the QAA Quality Code. This recommendation has been implemented for the USCF, with students able to nominate topics for consultation via an open VLE forum. As of April 16, 129 students nominated a total of 57 individual topics; these were grouped as appropriate into 22 consultation topics by SConsO (for example, the consultation topic ‘Tuition’ grouped the following threads: Tutorials/day schools, tutor hours online, variability in ALs, face-to-face tutorials, OU Live improvements, access to other online tutorials).

Of the 22 consultation topics suggested by students:

- 4 (18%) were approved by the USCE;
- 6 (27%) were identified as being covered by other consultations (e.g. face-to-face or SST);
- 10 (45%) were deemed inappropriate for current consultation, either due to the timing of the topic, the narrowness of subject, or work already underway to address the issues raised;
- 1 (5%) was put aside to be reviewed for consultation later in the year; and
• 1 (5%) has not yet been discussed by USCE.

Of the 14 consultations in the period covered by this review, the following 4 (29%) were nominated by students:

• ‘Assessment’ (ranked joint 1st for number of posts; joint 2nd for number of students posting);
• ‘Single point of contact throughout your studies’ (ranked 4th for number of posts; joint 3rd for number of students posting);
• ‘Entering OU study’ (ranked 6th for number of posts; 5th for number of students posting);
• ‘Technology Enhanced Learning’ (ranked 3rd for number of posts; 7th for number of students posting).

This suggests that the student-nominated topics collectively rank in the top half of the consultations in terms of the number of posts and the number of individual students posting.

**Recommendation USCF-5:** Students should continue to be encouraged to nominate topics for consultation and the University Students Consultative Executive should consider taking at least 5 student-nominated topics forward for consultation each year.

Staff who had moderated a consultation on the USCF gave an average accordance rating of 3.9 to the statement ‘The subject matters of the consultations are appropriate’; staff in attendance and students both gave a rating of 3.8 to the same statement. However some students commented that some topics can be irrelevant, while some questions were too detailed to be easily answered and needed to be more open.

**Recommendation USCF-6:** Consultations should have questions where there is more room for open discussion, with less detail, and should normally take place at the divergent stage of a project to avoid consulting on the detail of recommendations that have already been formulated. However, care should be taken to ensure that questions do not become abstract and vague. This advice should be included in the guidance for topic initiators, and the quality of background information and questions should be carefully monitored by the Executive.

### 7.1.3 Students

A recommendation was made in the previous report for the University to set out expectations about the levels of commitment required by student volunteers. Guidance for 15/16 student volunteers was updated and given greater prominence in communications to student consultation volunteers and potential volunteers, however 52% of students in the volunteer survey stated that greater clarity about what was expected of them would have made them more likely to contribute to the forums.

**Recommendation USCF-7:** SConsO should review guidance to include simplified ‘headline’ information for potential student volunteers, to manage expectations of what is required of them, and in particular, to counter the dominance of some discussions by a small number of students, there should be new guidance on the importance of stepping back from the discussion at times and allowing others to contribute. Guidance on managing dominant voices should also be included in briefing and training for moderators.
When the University Consultative Students Forum was first set up it engaged a panel of 50 volunteer students, who, alongside OU Students Association representatives and student volunteer representatives of each SST consultative forum, were recruited for 12 months to respond to all consultation topics within that period.

At the time of the last annual effectiveness review, the forum membership included 118 volunteers, as follows: 9 OU Students Association representatives, 30 Students Association representatives who are members of governance committees, 63 student volunteers and 16 SST representatives. Overall, Students Association nominated students made up 33% of the consultative panel.

This was improved in order to increase the breadth of engagement overall and in individual consultations. So for the 15/16 consultation period, 100 student volunteers were allocated to the consultative panel, recruitment for which was widely publicised during July 2015 with a deadline for applications of 31 July. Overall there were 265 applications for 89 places on the University Students Consultative Forum (there were 11 continuing volunteers). These places were filled as advertised on a first-come-first-basis, but with adjustments made to enable the forum to reflect the current student profile in relation to age, qualification level, nation and subject area and to be over-represented in relation to widening access criteria students and ‘new regime’ students.

The remaining applicants, and subsequent volunteers (up to 100 students), were placed on a waiting list to be invited to take part in Student Support Team Consultative Forum consultations and to fill any places that became vacant on the USCF.

To increase engagement, a recommendation was made in the previous review to promote a withdrawal and replacement process to ensure that panel numbers are maintained, and the panel is refreshed by replacing non-contributing students. This recommendation has been implemented via the following actions:

- The withdrawal process has been included in guidance for student volunteers and is advertised on website and in email communications;
- Waiting lists are now kept following the current round of recruitment;
- Students are able to sign up at any time to join forums that are undersubscribed or be placed on waiting lists for forums that are full.

These changes have resulted in 28 withdrawals from the USCF. In order to maintain a pool of active volunteers, in December 2015 27 new student volunteers from the waiting list were invited to join the forum. This correlates to a rise in forum activity in December (during the Assessment consultation), which can be seen in table ‘USCF Forum Posts’ below; however this could be down to the subject matter being of particular interest to students. In February 2016 a further 20 volunteers from the waiting list were added to the USCF, and in March 2016 a further 20. Students were selected from the waiting list in line with the criteria above.

It was proposed that non-participants should be more actively managed for the University Students Consultative Forum with a gentle reminder that participation is expected and students who don’t respond removed from forum membership. Accordingly, in February 20 volunteers were removed from the USCF list for non-participation. However, it was subsequently decided that it was less resource intensive for the same outcome to simply add students from the waiting list to the forum as participation dropped off.
The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average accordance rating of 2.6 to the statement ‘A good mix of students participated in the consultation’. Of these 20 members of staff, 10 (50%) stated that the one thing they would change about the process was to have more or a wider variety of students involved in the consultations; some stated that this was because they felt that the views expressed by the student volunteers were not fully representative. Staff who had moderated a consultation on the USCF gave an average accordance rating of 2.8 to the same statement, while staff in attendance to a USCF forum gave a rating of 2.6. Student volunteers on the USCF gave a rating of 3.5 to this statement.

The demographic breakdown of all online student volunteers is as follows:

- **Age**: Student volunteers are 20% more likely than the general student population to be aged 44 or over (this statistic is the same for those volunteers who have posted at least once on the USCF).
- **Ethnicity**: The ethnicity of the online volunteers is broadly representative of the general student population, with the exception of ‘White British’ which is over-represented by 5.3% (this rises to 9.4% of those who have contributed to the USCF).
- **Length of study with the OU**: Students who have studied with the OU for less than 2 years are under-represented by the volunteers by 1%; however this rises to 12.8% of those who contribute to the USCF. Those who have been with the OU for between 2-5 years are broadly represented, however those who have studied with the OU for more than 5 years are over-represented by 6.2% amongst the volunteers and by 11% amongst USCF contributors. This suggests that students who have been with the OU for longer are more likely to contribute to online consultations, and therefore this should be taken into account when recruiting to the 16/17 membership to ensure a more representative ratio of contributors.
- **Gender**: the previous report stated that more student volunteers are female than the general population; this remains true for the 15/16 membership, however the disparity is only 3.3% and therefore the volunteers can be said to be broadly representative of the student population in terms of gender.
- **Marital status and sexual orientation**: as was the case in the previous report, it remains difficult to draw any reliable conclusions concerning the marital status and sexual orientation of the student volunteers; this is due to the high proportion of students (62%) for whom the University does not hold this information.
- **Nationality**: the nationality of the student volunteers (and those who contribute to the USCF) is broadly representative of the student population.
- **Qualification Level**: the qualification level of student volunteers (and those who contribute to the USCF) is broadly representative of the student population.
- **Region**: As in the previous report, the student volunteers are slightly more likely to come from northern than southern regions, however with the exception of The OU in the North to which many international students are attached (which is over-represented by approx. 10% by both volunteers and USCF contributors), the difference for any single region is no more than 2.6% for student volunteers and 4.6% for USCF contributors.
- **Religious Belief**: As in the previous report, student volunteers (and USCF contributors) who profess to a specific religion are broadly representative, with the exception of Christians of no particular denomination who were over-represented by 9.4% (this falls to 7.7% for those who contribute to the USCF).
- **Subject Area**: Arts & Humanities are over-represented by 5.4% amongst the student volunteers; this rises to 6% for the USCF contributors. Law students are over-represented by 7.5% amongst student volunteers, however this falls to 3.6% for the USCF contributors. All other subject areas are broadly represented by the volunteers and contributors on the USCF.

- **Disability**: There are 631 unique disabled students included in the online volunteers and 47 amongst those who contributed to the USCF consultations.

In conclusion, the student volunteers (and those who contribute to the USCF) are broadly representative of the general student population in the majority of areas, the least representative area being age.

**Recommendation USCF-8**: SconsO should ensure that the volunteers recruited are representative of the general student population to within a 5% difference; exceptions can be made in areas of positive discrimination as appropriate.

**Recommendation USCF-9**: SconsO should update the staff membership categories of the USCF in line with changes in the organisation and management of the University.

### 7.2 Process

#### 7.2.1 Questions and Information Provided

A recommendation made in the previous report was to ensure that forums of which a student is a member appear automatically on their StudentHome page, to help inform them of new consultative opportunities. Although this was not implemented in 15/16 as changes to the VLE were understood to be in place that would make this happen automatically, it is recommended that this be further investigated for 16/17, following feedback from some students that the consultative structure can be ‘confusing - how many are there, which strand do I belong to, how do they all work alongside each other - even the navigation to that section of forums is baffling.’

**Recommendation USCF-10**: A link to ‘Consultation Forums’ should be placed on the StudentHome page.

**Recommendation USCF-11**: SConsO should set up a ‘student consultation’ email list so that all students with an interest in student consultation can be regularly updated about opportunities for involvement and responses to feedback through an e-newsletter.

Topic initiators are required to provide appropriate background information for students, to enable them to respond to the topic questions from an informed perspective. The previous review suggested that whilst informed students provided higher quality feedback, moderators and initiators were concerned that some students did not read information provided, and that increased levels of pre-consultation reading decreased engagement. Initiators are able to view the forum discussion, but do not tend to contribute unless to answer a specific question. Moderators are also able to view this background information and staff who had moderated a USCF forum gave an average accordance rating of 3.5 to the statement ‘Information provided about the consultations is helpful and timely’.
Students gave the statement ‘information about the consultation is provided at the right time’ an average rating of 3.7, and 3.5 to the statement ‘the background information allows me to provide an informed opinion’. 82% stated that being given more or less background reading would not have made a difference to their level of participation; therefore it can be surmised that the amount of background information given to students is currently at the right level. One student suggested that background information should be sent attached to the email inviting students to the forum.

7.2.2 Contributions

A recommendation was made in the previous review to offer an ‘Agree’ option for volunteers to express agreement with postings, in the expectation that this would reduce repetition in the forums, increase engagement and reduce complexity of collation. This action has been implemented and ‘Like’ and ‘Favourite’ buttons have been added and are being used in a limited way by students. Another recommendation made by the previous review was to enable students to formally opt in to particular consultations based on experience, demographic or interest required by the topic initiator, with the expectation that this would reduce the number of consultations students were invited to participate in, and consequently increase engagement in individual consultations. However, this recommendation was not undertaken as it was felt that this would constitute an unnecessary complication for students, reducing engagement, and would require additional resources to administer.

During the 14/15 reporting period, the average number of posts per consultation was 297, with the average number of students posting at least once per consultation being 31. Engagement in the first consultation on Group Tuition was high, with 901 posts and 69 individual students posting at least once. However engagement dropped significantly after this, and continued to decrease over the year as demonstrated in Table 2 below:

Table 2:
Table 3 below provides the same analysis for the consultations during the 15/16 reporting period, during which time the average number of posts per consultation was 344, with the average number of students posting at least once per consultation being 54. This is an increase of 16% and 74% respectively on the previous reporting period, which shows that there has been a significant overall increase in engagement with the USCF forums, when compared to 2014/15.

**Table 3:**

![2015/16 USCF Forum Posts](image)

Table 3 above illustrates a continued pattern of peaks and troughs in the number of posts per consultation, while the number of students posting at least once in each forum is steadier (the slight peak for the consultation on the provision of financial information can be attributed to the fact that this was the first consultation following the recruitment of the new student volunteers).

The stability of the number of students posting compared to the fluctuation in the number of posts suggests that the volume of activity in a consultation does not necessarily reflect the number of students engaging with it. This is further evidenced by the figures below, which details the percentage of the total posts for each consultation, as contributed by the top three users on each forum:

**Table 4:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Total posts</th>
<th>By most active 3 users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locations Analysis</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>36 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student communications</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>38 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of financial information to students</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>75 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and strategy for Library Services</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>106 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUSA’s regional structure in England</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>150 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single point of contact throughout your studies</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>103 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>177 (41%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining the OU’s strategic direction  341  150 (44%)
Entering OU study  177  66 (37%)
The Student Charter  95  32 (34%)
Academic freedom policy  44  14 (32%)
Student Recruitment and Support Centre Training  62  18 (29%)
Online and Onscreen Learning  283  101 (36%)
Payment of OUSA President and Deputy President  158  61 (39%)

On average, 35% of the responses to consultations carried out by the USCF were provided by 3 individual students; this percentage rises to 47% when calculated on the posts made by the top 5 contributing students (who are consistent individuals across the forums). This undermines the degree to which the outcomes of the consultations are representative of the student population as a whole. This is reflected in the survey responses from students, a number of whom stated that they felt that the forums tended to be dominated by a small number of posters who can come across as dominating and critical of other students’ contributions, with the concern that this ‘means the end impression is just their opinion rather than a wider impression’. A suggestion made by students for overcoming this is to limit the number of posts from individuals. This issue was also raised by staff involved in the consultations.

**Recommendation USCF-12:** SconsO should remove the right of continuing volunteers to take priority in the allocation of places on the USCF.

Students involved in the online consultative mechanisms were asked why they might not have contributed to the forums; results are shown in Table 5 below.

*NB: This data is for all online consultative forums, not just the USCF*

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Student Non-Participation</th>
<th>Yes this was a factor</th>
<th>No this wasn't an issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just haven’t got round to it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wasn’t clear what was expected of me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t think it would impact on OU decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel confident in posting to the forum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not feel I had anything to contribute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic(s) did not interest me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time because of other commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time because of study commitments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some examples of free text answers to the above include:

- **Put off by a small number of opinionated posters.**
- **I did not know anything about the topics. Also, I find the chain of conversation in a forum with lots of people difficult to follow.**
- **Most of the questions were far too detailed to try and get a click response; you need more context and more open questions.**

Therefore it can be concluded that lack of time (either due to study or other commitments) is the single biggest reason for students not participating in forums. However, there are a number of other reasons which should be addressed.

These findings are supported by the results of the General Student Survey (GSS). In the 14/15 GSS, 73% of students said that the reason they had not yet volunteered was because they were unaware of the opportunity, with 29% of students citing a lack of time as a barrier to volunteering. In the 15/16 survey, lack of time became the biggest barrier with 63% of students giving this as their reason for not wanting to volunteer. The second biggest barrier (selected by 26% of students) was not feeling confident enough to be involved in consultations; only one student specified not being aware of the process. One student (2% of respondents) gave the reason ‘I don't think my views would be acted upon’, while 3 students (6%) stated ‘I'm not interested in influencing how the OU works’.

**Recommendation USCF-13:** SConsO should offer forum briefing and training (e.g. synchronously via OU Live), with a Q&A element, to potential and new student volunteers to increase confidence in using the forums and awareness of other consultative activities.

Students who had not participated in the forums were asked what might have encouraged them to participate; results are shown in Table 6 below.

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Change</th>
<th>Yes, I would have been more likely to contribute</th>
<th>No, this hasn't been an issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation at a different time of year</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More background reading</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less background reading</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater expectation of influencing decision-making</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forums open for longer</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater clarity about what was expected of me</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More relevant topics</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interesting topics</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
<td>![Bar Chart Data]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some examples of free text answers to the question posed in Table 6 include:

- *Knowing that what the students are telling the OU will make changes. Otherwise all the consultancy is just a waste of time.*
- *Use a better forum platform. Reach out in more relevant ways - I get far too many emails with useless content from the OU and do sometimes miss things because I've skimmed over a message.*
- *Raising awareness more.*

The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average accordance rating of 3.4 to the statement ‘The student input was of high quality’; staff in attendance gave a rating of 3.3 to the same statement. Therefore it can be surmised that the contributions from the students participating are of a fair quality, but participation from more students is needed. This should be addressed by the recommended increase in the number of student volunteers (see 7.1.3).

### 7.2.3 Moderation

SConsO have a pool of moderators to call upon as needed to moderate the various consultations run under the USCF. An expression of interest form and information on the role of a moderator is available on the intranet, and the role has been promoted several time on OU Life and in other places; however 76% of staff who responded to the survey for ‘staff not directly involved in the consultation process’ stated that they were not aware that all Open University staff are invited to join a pool of online forum moderators for the student consultative process. It is therefore recommended that the role of moderator be more widely publicised; see recommendation USCF-15 below. A recommendation made in the previous review was to supply script, guidance and further information to moderators, and to enable the sharing of best moderation practice. Although this was already in place to a certain extent, guidance for moderators has been updated and published on the intranet and is generally circulated to less experienced moderators in advance of consultations. Staff who completed the survey questions for those who had moderated a consultation on the USCF gave the average accordance rating of 4.3 to the statement ‘The guidance notes for moderators are helpful’.

Training is offered via the tutor moderator training for online forums, however there is no initial assessment or ongoing review required and the skills of individual moderators can vary considerably. SST consultative forums in particular sometimes have moderators who do not necessarily have appropriate training or experience. Furthermore, SConsO report that at times the optimal number of volunteer moderators is not always readily available for all consultations, and individual moderators can therefore be called on repeatedly. Moderators do not have protected time to moderate the University forums and this can impact on the amount of time they are able to spend moderating the forum; one moderator who completed the staff survey stated that if they could change one thing about the consultation process it would be to ‘be able to devote more time to the forum rather than trying to cram it in between ordinary work tasks’. However it is difficult to quantify the impact this situation has on the quality of the forum moderation (and by extension, the output of the consultation).

The staff who completed the survey questions for those involved in organising a consultation and for those in attendance in the USCF both gave an average rating of 3.9 to the question ‘The consultation was appropriately moderated’; students gave a rating of 3.8 to this statement. In terms of the level of staff involvement, 65% of students who responded to the survey felt that staff involvement in the
forums was ‘about right’, while 23% felt that staff involvement had been ‘not quite enough’ and 8% that staff involvement was ‘not nearly enough’; 4% felt that staff involvement was ‘a bit too much’.

However, a number of students commented that more staff should be involved in the forums (not necessarily as moderators), including ALs, staff tutors and policy makers.

**Recommendation USCF-14**: Consultation organisers should be visible on the forum to give students confidence that they are being listened to by policy makers (e.g. through posting introductions to themselves and/or the topics).

Guidance for initiators, moderators and students has been updated in line with the recommendations made in the previous review; further training was also provided. However these actions should be repeated no less than annually.

**Recommendation USCF-15**: SconsO should produce and implement a moderator recruitment and training plan in order to publicise the role of moderator more widely and increase the pool of available volunteers; also to refresh the pool on no less than an annual basis, reminding members of the role description and asking them to opt in again. The information on the role of moderator should specify that normally at least one moderator will be assigned per forum; it should also include an accompanying guideline as to the amount of time moderating a consultation is expected to take. This is in order to manage the expectations of potential moderators (and their line managers). The plan should include an opportunity for staff to attend a face-to-face session to find out more about what being a moderator means and to provide an opportunity for potential moderators to ask questions. As part of the plan SconsO should also provide a session for current moderators to meet each other and student representatives, and to exchange good practice and celebrate the impact they are making.

The previous report made the recommendation that students should be invited to become moderators as well as staff; this was discussed but not implemented in the period 15/16.

**Recommendation USCF-16**: SconsO should work with OU the Students Association to develop a small trial using volunteer student moderators in 2016/17 and report back to the Executive on the way forward for the long term.

### 7.2.4 Technology

Forums continue to be hosted on the OU’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The advantages of this remain:

- Students are familiar with the operation as this system is embedded in the Open University teaching model;
- The asynchronous nature of these forums allows students to post when they are able to, rather than requiring them to be available at specific times;
- Students are able to contribute to the consultations independent of time or location.

The disadvantages remain:

- Participants are not able to interact in ‘real time’;
- The forum process does not enable straightforward quantitative analysis;
The forums can be a barrier to students dependent on assistive screen technology. The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average rating of 3.4 to the question ‘The technology used enables consultation’, while those who had moderated or attended a USCF consultation gave an average rating of 3.7 and 3.1 respectively to this question; students gave a rating of 3.6.

In response to the General Student Survey question ‘how useful do you think online forums are in general for enabling the University to hear students’ opinions?’, 22% of students stated ‘very useful’, 40% stated ‘useful’, 38% ‘to some extent useful’ and 1% ‘not at all useful’.

A recommendation was made in the previous review to investigate other online mechanisms for consultation, with the anticipated impact of improved contribution within consultations and a wider breadth of students engaging in the consultative process. 56% of students supported the use of synchronous forums (such as OU Live) for consultation, while 36% of students felt that social media platforms external to the OU (e.g. Twitter and Facebook) should also be used for consultation. The most popular free text suggestion was for surveys to be employed as a method of consultation; one student suggested using conference calls. 73% of students felt that asynchronous forums such as those in use were an appropriate consultative mechanism.

**Recommendation USCF-17:** SconsO should explore whether the functionality available in the replacement for OU Live would support synchronous consultations and, if so, develop a proposal for a pilot for consideration by the Executive.

**Recommendation USCF-18:** SConsO should pilot the use of polls at the end of consultations, where appropriate for the topic. Poll results could be included in the summary outputs, which would help to address staff and student concerns that some voices on the forums are overly dominant.

### 7.2.5 Outputs

The output of each USCF forum is a summary document, normally drafted by a member of the SConsO and approved by moderators involved in the forum. Staff in attendance are asked to confirm next steps but are not expected to make changes to the summary. This is then posted in draft to the forum to allow students to comment on the draft summary.

The previous report recommended that feedback was given within 4 weeks on the aspects of the consultation that will influence the project, with a response given on the actual influence the project had within 6 months. In response to this, guidance to consultation organisers was updated and some attempts were made to keep organisers to a timetable of providing an interim update within 4-6 weeks and a full response within 6 months.

The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average rating of 4.1 to the question ‘The summary was accurate and fair’, while those who had moderated a USCF consultation gave an average rating of 4.3. Staff in attendance on USCF forums gave a rating of 3.9, while students gave a rating of 3.7.
Recommendation USCF-19: Students should continue to be encouraged to comment on the draft summaries, but are given a deadline (e.g. one week) to do so before their feedback is incorporated into the summary. This should also be implemented as standard for all other forums.

Table 7 below indicates the time taken to post summaries and responses to the consultations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Forum closed</th>
<th>Summary posted</th>
<th>Response posted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locations Analysis</td>
<td>3 June 15</td>
<td>9 June 15</td>
<td>5 Oct 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student communications</td>
<td>22 June 15</td>
<td>30 June 15</td>
<td>16 Dec 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of financial information to students</td>
<td>28 Sept 15</td>
<td>6 Oct 15</td>
<td>11 Dec 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and strategy for Library Services</td>
<td>27 Oct 15</td>
<td>12 Nov 15</td>
<td>17 Feb 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUSA’s regional structure in England</td>
<td>18 Nov 15</td>
<td>3 Dec 15</td>
<td>9 Feb 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single point of contact throughout your studies</td>
<td>21 Dec 15</td>
<td>7 Jan 16</td>
<td>17 Feb 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>25 Jan 16</td>
<td>4 Feb 16</td>
<td>10 May 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the OU’s strategic direction</td>
<td>8 Feb 16</td>
<td>23 Feb 16</td>
<td>18 April 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering OU study</td>
<td>21 Feb 16</td>
<td>2 March 16</td>
<td>17 May 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Student Charter</td>
<td>14 March 16</td>
<td>21 March 16</td>
<td>24 June 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic freedom policy</td>
<td>20 April 16</td>
<td>4 May 16</td>
<td>20 June 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Recruitment and Support Centre Training</td>
<td>27 April 16</td>
<td>17 May 16</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and Onscreen Learning</td>
<td>8 May 16</td>
<td>27 May 16</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment of OUSA President and Deputy President</td>
<td>30 May 16</td>
<td>7 June 16</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A recommendation made in the last report was to investigate different techniques for summarising qualitative responses in forums, including coding responses in order to enable identification of changes in opinions over the lifecycle of forums, with the expectation that this would result in greater confidence from all parties in the conclusions drawn. Analysis of qualitative data training was undertaken within SConsO to improve summarising techniques and SConsO is now investigating the use of software that would enable more automated analysis. The University’s Knowledge Media Institute has developed tools to enable sentiment analysis and behaviour analysis of forums and it is proposed that these tools should be used in the consultative process, to improve the accuracy, detail and objectivity of consultation summaries without the need for significant additional staff resource. Using natural language processing, text analysis and computational linguistics the tools would analyse forum activity to help determine the overall views of the forum on the topic; the tools would also be able to analyse the different type of roles that students take up in discussions e.g. ‘lurker’, ‘contributor’, ‘leader’ and ‘follower’.

Recommendation USCF-20: Sentiment and behaviour analysis software developed by KMI should be used to support the drafting of summaries. This will improve efficiency, offer more useful consultation data and help provide objectivity in the summaries.

7.3 Outcomes

7.3.1 Feedback Loop
Staff in attendance on USCF forums gave an average accordance rating of 3.3 to the statement ‘Updates on action take as a result of consultation are timely’; students also gave an average rating of 3.3.

7.3.2 Influence

The feedback from staff who organised consultations on the USCF was mixed in regards to the impact of the consultation and the degree to which the consultation outcome met with the organiser’s objectives.

The staff who completed the survey for those involved in organising a consultation on the USCF gave an average rating of 3 to the question ‘The consultation met my objectives’ however individual ratings ranged from 1-5, while the question ‘The consultation influenced decision making’ received an average rating of 3.2 although again individual ratings also ranged from 1-5.

Examples of open responses to how well the consultation influenced decision making are:

- Unfortunately it did not influence decision making. The feedback received was too heavily biased to a few student views.
- They endorsed policy improvements and are informing implementation.
- They have been carefully considered by the working group and triggered a lot of discussion. Some specific suggestions about the wording of the document were accepted. When they were rejected, there was a valid reason for it. The feedback also generated a lot of ideas about the implementation stage, e.g. communication, visibility, etc.

It is therefore clear that there is a great deal of variation in the degree to which consultations run on the USCF in 15-16 have influenced decision making.

Staff in attendance at USCF forums gave an average rating of 2.7 for the statement ‘I have seen how consultation has influenced decision making’, while student volunteers for the USCF gave a rating of 2.9 to the same statement. The fact that this is lower than the degree to which USCF organisers felt that consultations had influenced decision making suggests that where decision making has been influenced, this needs to be better communicated. Comments on this issue from students include:

- Consultation feedback should explain why changes are not being made on some issues, rather than just detailing the changes that are planned.
- Show that the feedback has been implemented. So forums are not just a box ticking exercise.
- Senior managers (who have the power to make decisions) need to be part of the forums and they should act upon the issues raised by the students.

47% of students felt that having a greater expectation of influencing decision-making would have made them more likely to participate in the forums (NB: This statistic is for all online forums, not just the USCF).

**Recommendation USCF-21**: Consultation organisers should improve post-consultation communications. These communications should include information on where feedback was considered but not acted upon (and the reasons for this) as well as where feedback has influenced decision-making.

7.3.3 Conclusions
Staff and student engagement with the USCF has increased during 15/16 and staff able to respond to the statement ‘The process has been more effective than last year’ gave average accordance ratings as follows:

- USCF moderators: 3.8
- Staff in attendance: 3.3

Where staff who had been involved either as an organiser, moderator, or staff in attendance completed the survey and were asked what one thing they would change, the majority of responses recommended involving more students in the consultations. Several staff members also recommended involving more staff in the consultation, for example encouraging more debate between staff and students during the consultation.

**Recommendations USCF-22:** SConsO should draw up an annual communications plan aimed at staff, which for 2016/17 will need to address staff concerns about how representative the volunteer panel is of the student body, and offer advice on when to consult. 29% of staff not directly involved in the consultative process stated that they were not aware that the University has a student consultative process. Although the majority of staff not directly involved in the process were aware of it, effort should be made to improve this ratio for the future.

A recommendation in the previous report was to create a communication plan to ensure that information is fed back to students through a variety of push and pull mechanisms (e.g. OU Students Association Magazine), with the expectation that this would encourage wider engagement with the consultative process and raise awareness of consultation mechanism. While a formal plan was not developed, greater use was made of available communication channels to promote student consultation. However, due to capacity within SConsO this recommendation was not fully implemented and there is still room for improvement. Therefore it is recommended that this be carried forward to 16/17.

**Recommendation USCF-23:** SConsO should develop a formal annual communication plan aimed at students, using a wide variety of communication channels more regularly to raise students’ awareness of consultation opportunities and outcomes, including channels managed by the Communications Unit and the OU Students Association. Staff who have made good use of the consultation process could be used as advocates as could existing volunteers.

**Recommendation USCF-24:** The updating of all consultation documentation and websites should be an annual task carried out by SConsO, embedded as a standing recommendation in the Effectiveness Review.

### 8. Student Support Team Forums (Inc. Open Degree Forum)

Each Student Support Team (SST) has its own online student consultative forum to consult students on both operational and curriculum-related issues in that subject area.

50 students involved in the SST forums responded to the student volunteer survey. Feedback from students presented below is from these students unless otherwise stated.
8.1 Inputs

8.1.1 Scheduling

Although SSTs are expected to run three forums per year, the majority of SSTs have only run one during 15/16. The Postgraduate Science and Online and Distance Education SSTs have still had no consultation, although the Online and Distance Education SST is using other methods of student engagement via Associate Lecturers and a blog.

Although several SSTs did produce summaries, only Language Studies, Law, Access and Postgraduate Business and Management have produced responses to consultations that address the feedback from students.

The majority of the SST forums ran for 14 days; the longest being 17 days and the shortest 8 days with the average being 13. The majority of the forums were run during October, November and December, although two were run in April/May while the Open Degree forum, which had the most activity, was scheduled in September.

Table 8:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SST Forum</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Education</td>
<td>14-28 April</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>30 April – 7 May</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Degree</td>
<td>16-30 September</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood, Youth &amp; Education</td>
<td>13-21 October</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>30 Oct – 16 Nov</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing &amp; IT</td>
<td>30 Oct – 16 Nov</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Business</td>
<td>9-20 November</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>13-27 November</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Science</td>
<td>16-30 November</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>16-30 November</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care</td>
<td>25 Nov – 9 Dec</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Studies</td>
<td>30 Nov – 11 Dec</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>1-15 December</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Business</td>
<td>1-15 December</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>1-15 December</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths &amp; Stats</td>
<td>2-16 December</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

69% of students who responded felt that there had been about the right number of consultations since September 15, while 2% felt that there had been a few too many, 15% that there had been not quite enough and 15% that there had been not nearly enough. 81% felt that the consultation forum had been open for about the right length of time, while 15% felt that the consultations had been a bit too short and 4% that they had been far too short.

It can therefore be concluded that one 2 week subject-based consultation per year is appropriate.

8.1.2 Topics

The previous report made the recommendation that for SST forums, topics should be relevant to students who are engaged in the forum, with the expectation that this would increase engagement
and improve the quality of outputs. Updated guidance for SST leads was therefore presented at the meeting of the SST Community in Practice in June and organisers of SST forums gave an average accordance rating of 3.6 to the statement ‘I was able to access the information and advice I needed to plan the consultation(s)’.

**Recommendation SST-1**: Guidance on consultation aimed at SST leads should be more widely publicised across SSTs.

SSTs set their own topics for consultation, however this is inconsistent across the SSTs (one reason given for this is that individual SSTs have not always had specific topics to consult on). Most staff responding to the survey felt that there had been about the right number of consultations, although one staff member suggested that one per year would be sufficient. Staff in attendance gave the statement ‘The subject matters of the consultations are appropriate’ an average accordance rating of 3.4 while moderators gave a rating of 4.2 and students 3.7 for the same statement. One staff member commented that the ‘one thing’ they would change about the consultation process would be to ‘agree topic with wider community not just impose the topic’; several students also requested input into the choosing of consultation topics.

**Recommendation SST-2**: Consultations should take place only when appropriate and not to achieve the right ‘quota’. Students be able to propose consultation topics.

### 8.1.3 Students

As well as the standing membership recruited in July 2016, recruitment for the SST forums took place immediately in advance of each forum either through a message on StudentHome or via direct email, which resulted in a higher take-up.

For Postgraduate Business and Management, all students linked to the Student Support Team were added as forum members before the forum opened; they were then emailed directly asking them to participate which they were able to do straight away (participation for this forum was 22% below average for the total number of posts and 33% above average for the number of students posting).

The Open Degree Student Consultative Forum specifies equal numbers of BD and QD students in its terms of reference. There were 65 new volunteers in total plus 15 continuing, but only 20 QD volunteers. Therefore to create a balanced forum there is now also a waiting list for BD places on this forum and further recruitment is only for QD students.

As with the USCF, the ‘one thing’ staff involved in running SST forums wanted to change most was for a better mix of students to be involved, and responded to the statement ‘A good mix of students participate in the consultations’ with the average accordance rating of:

- Organisers: 2.9
- Moderators: 2.6
- Staff in attendance: 3.2
- Student: 3.5
One organiser commented that ‘the specific consultation evidently had little relevance to some of those who signed up for it so they didn’t participate’ and one stated that ‘students who participated [in the forum] were all successful and engaged students so did not gain the perspective of students who struggled or made the wrong choices’. A recommendation made by an SST organiser was to ‘find ways of engaging students who are less likely to come on forums or have less time to input. Their involvement may help us understand better the retention needs of busy students, of those students who are more at risk of withdrawing due to life events.’

8.2 Process

8.2.1 Questions and Information Provided

The previous report made the recommendation to allow student volunteers access to questions before the start of the consultation period, with the expectation that this would improve the quality of discussion within the forums. The guidance for SST leads was updated accordingly, and students gave an average accordance rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘information about the consultation is provided at the right time’, and 3.6 to the statement ‘the background information allows me to provide an informed opinion’. One student suggested sending the background information attached to the invitation email, but no other comments were made by students on this issue. Therefore it can be surmised that the level of background information currently provided is about right.

As with the USCF forums, SST forums assign staff ‘in attendance’ to the consultation to answer any specific questions students may have. Staff in attendance on SST forums gave an average rating of 3.4 to the statement ‘Information provided about the consultations is helpful and timely’, and 3.1 to the statement ‘My involvement in the consultations is useful’.

8.2.2 Contributions

Although with the exception of the Open Degree forum there was less overall variability in forum activity, as with the UCSE the number of posts per SST forum varied more than the number of students posting, as can be seen in Table 9 below.

SConsO report that although there has been some positive feedback from SSTs about participation, overall there has been more frustration about the small number of students involved.

Table 9
Of the 16 SST forums that were run, the average number of students posting to the forum at least once was 21, while the average number of posts per forum was 103. The largest variance from this was the Open Degree forum with 43 students posting and 390 posts – see Table 10 below.

Table 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SST Forum</th>
<th>Total students signed up</th>
<th>Total students participating</th>
<th>Total posts</th>
<th>By 3 most active users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Education</td>
<td>Open to all PG Ed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3 (38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Degree</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>44 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood, Youth &amp; Education</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>42 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>59 (49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing &amp; IT</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>82 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Business</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>82 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>116 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Science</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>181 (37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>91 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35 (51%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>190 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate Business</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>80 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>169 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths &amp; Stats</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16 (75%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On average, the 3 most active students on each forum contributed 37% of the total number of posts; this rose to 52% when calculated on the contributions from the 5 most active students. The exception to this was again the Open Degree forum, on which the 3 and 5 most active students contributed 11% and 18% respectively of the total number of posts.

Students from the SST forums commented that the majority of contribution came from an ‘an established group of contributors, who are also active on the equivalent FB pages’, however was not as big an issue as on the USCF forums.

Organisers of SST forums gave the statement ‘The student input was of high quality’ an average accordance rating of 3.7, while staff in attendance gave a rating of 3.6 to the same statement. This suggests that although the contributions from students who participate are of good quality, there remains a need to increase the number of students engaged (see recommendation under 7.1.3).

8.2.3 Moderation

SST moderators who responded to the staff survey gave positive feedback on the information and guidance provided to moderators, with the statement ‘information provided about the consultations is helpful and timely’ eliciting an average accordance rating of 4.2, and a rating of 4.8 against the statement ‘the guidance notes for moderators are helpful’.

Staff in attendance at SST forums gave an average accordance rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘The consultations are appropriately moderated’, while organisers gave a rating of 3.9 and students a rating of 3.6.

One comment made via the staff survey was that at times the ratio of moderators to students was too high with the result that the students’ voices were ‘drowned out’; another staff member made the suggestion that organisers should ‘monitor how many staff are involved and ask some to step down if there are only a few students participating’. However, only 2% (1 respondent) of students felt that staff involvement in the forums was ‘much too much’, while 68% felt that it was ‘about right’, 21% that it was ‘not quite enough’ and 9% that is was ‘not nearly enough’.

8.2.4 Technology

As with the consultations run by the USCF, the SST forums are hosted on the OU’s VLE and as such are subject to the same technological advantages and disadvantages as described in 4.2.5.

In response to the statement ‘The technology used enables consultation’ staff involved in SST forums gave the following average accordance ratings:

- Organisers: 3.2
- Moderators: 3.2
- Staff in attendance: 3.1
- Students: 3.6

8.2.5 Outputs
As with the USCF consultations, the output from the SST forums is a summary document. A recommendation made in the previous review was for SST summaries to be communicated to Faculty Committees, with the anticipated impact that this would increase engagement with consultation process in lower levels of OU governance structure. It was felt by SConsO that Programme Committees rather than Faculty Committees would be more appropriate; this recommendation was then fed in the Governance Review Faculty Committees work stream and guidance to SST leads was updated to include reference to Programme Committees. However the degree to which this action has had the anticipated impact is unclear.

Staff in attendance gave the statement ‘The summaries are accurate and fair’ an average accordance rating of 3.5; students gave a rating of 3.6 for this statement; however, no summary was published for the majority of the SST student consultative forum consultations.

8.3 Outcomes

8.3.1 Feedback Loop

SST moderators gave the statement ‘Updates on action take as a result of consultation are timely’ an average accordance rating of 4, while staff in attendance gave a rating of 3.5 and students a rating of 3.2 to the same statement. This is likely due to the fact that in many cases no response to the consultations were published.

Recommendation SST-3: Where updates on action taken following consultation are given, SSTs should ensure that these are clearly communicated to students.

8.3.2 Influence

Feedback on the extent to which the consultation had influenced decision making was similar to the USCF for the SST forums.

Staff who organised an SST consultation gave an average accordance rating of 3.1 to the statement ‘The consultation(s) met my objectives’ (with a range of 1-5) and 3 to the statement ‘The consultation(s) influenced decision making’ (with a range of 2-5).

Examples of open responses to how well the consultation influenced decision making are:

- We have used the feedback to consider our approach to PDP, social media and general advice and guidance to students.
- I read out the students’ views at programme committee
- It did not – but info obtained used as peer advice document

Staff in attendance gave an average accordance rating of 2.4 to the statement ‘I have seen how consultation has influenced decision-making’, while students gave a rating of 2.9. As with the USCF, this suggests that where decision making has been influenced, this could be better communicated. One student commented that the ‘one thing’ they would change would be to ‘show and prove something has happened as a result of the forums – perhaps through notices in StudentHome’.
Recommendation SST-4: The level of post-consultation communication from organisers to those involved should be improved, providing updates on progress and information on those suggestions that have been considered but not taken forward (with an accompanying explanation) as well as information on where consultation feedback has had a direct impact.

8.3.3 Conclusions

The overall picture is not one in which the criteria for effective consultation have been met. In particular, there have been low rates of student participation and the publication of summaries of discussions and ‘You said, we did’ responses have either not happened at all or been significantly delayed.

The evidence also suggests that SST leads are experiencing difficulty in identifying topics for discussion and in allocating appropriate staffing to the consultations. Lines of responsibility are unclear and students have expressed frustration with the University being apparently unresponsive. It is therefore not appropriate for it to be mandatory to have regular consultations with students at the level of the Student Support Team.

Recommendation SST-5: Subject to approval by the Executive Deans each Board of Studies should have a Student Forum through which it will be expected to consult students at appropriate points in the cycle of meetings. It is proposed that the Chair of the Board of Studies and the Board of Studies Manager should be responsible for working with colleagues in the Faculty to identify topics for consultation arrange for the forums to be moderated and ensure summaries of discussions and ‘You said we did’ responses are provided to close the feedback loop. The Student Consultation Office would support the process by recruiting students setting up forums publicising the consultations and providing moderators from the volunteer pool if none are available from within the Faculty.

It is also recommended that if they wish individual SSTs could continue to have consultations with their students but this should not be mandatory. As now, the Student Consultation Office would support SSTs that wished to have consultations.

Advantages of this approach are:

- The Terms of Reference of the Boards of Studies is wide and there is potential for consultation across a wide range of topics during the year, including matters of interest to Student Support Teams.
- Consultations on curriculum issues have been amongst the most successful of those run by SSTs and the Boards of Studies are concerned with the day to day management and development of the curriculum. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that students identify more with their subject area/Faculty than their Student Support Team.
- There is a direct link from consultation into governance because Boards of Studies report to the Teaching Committee.
- Rather than have a standing membership, the set of students to be consulted each time could depend on the topic. However, it is proposed that the student representatives appointed by the OU Students Association to the Board of Studies should be included in all the consultations.
9. Postgraduate Research Students Consultative Forums

This online forum seeks and considers the views of postgraduate research students on matters specifically affecting their study and student experience.

4 students involved in the PGRF responded to the survey for volunteers involved in online consultative forums; feedback given below is from these students.

9.1 Inputs

9.1.1 Scheduling

The consultations run on this forum are very infrequent, and were not covered by the review carried out by SUMS Consulting last year. Therefore there are no recommendations requiring action in regard to these forums. No data was provided in the previous review for comparison in this review; therefore this review will include data from the first Postgraduate Research Student Consultative Forum discussion on the development of an OU Graduate School in March 2015.

The second Postgraduate Research Forum was run from 16 December 2015 to 27 January 2016; the third consultation, on Research Culture/Environment did not take place. Although the second forum was run over the Christmas holiday period, the length of the forum should have compensated for this being a busy time for students. 75% of students felt that there had been ‘about the right amount’ of consultations run on this forum.

9.1.2 Topics

Two consultations were agreed by the Research Degrees Management Group for 2015/16:

a) The Virtual Research Environment (VRE), with questions about how students communicate and receive information, ‘things I wish I’d known in the first year’, and utility of resources.

b) Research Culture/Environment, with questions on students’ understanding of ‘research culture/environment’, use of social media, and constructive suggestions for creating a sense of community. This consultation did not take place.

The questions were prioritised based on other student feedback (e.g. from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the graduate school consultation). Two academic leads were been identified for each consultation.

Students who responded to the volunteer survey gave a rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘the consultation topics are appropriate’.

9.1.3 Students

Although all Postgraduate Research students were invited to take part in the forum, only 9 volunteered to participate; however students gave a rating of 3.7 to the statement ‘there is a good mix of students involved’.
9.2 Process

9.2.1 Questions and Information Provided

Students gave a rating of 3.3 to the statement ‘information about the consultation is provided at the right time’, and 4 to the statement ‘the background information allows me to provide an informed opinion’.

9.2.2 Contributions

The consultation on the development of an OU graduate school ran for 21 days and received a total of 53 posts from 11 students. The consultation on the Virtual Research Environment ran for 42 days and received a total of 20 posts from 5 students.

9.2.3 Moderation

There were two moderators on the first forum and one moderator on the second forum with an additional member of staff ‘in attendance’. However students gave a rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘the forums are appropriately moderated’.

9.2.4 Technology

As with the consultations run by the USCF, the PGRF forums are hosted on the OU’s VLE and as such are subject to the same technological advantages and disadvantages as described in 4.2.5. Students gave a neutral rating of 3 to the statement ‘the technology used enables effective consultation’.

9.2.5 Outputs

The intended output from this forum is a summary document followed by a further response document. A summary was posted to the forum on the development of an OU graduate school; however no summary was posted to the forum on the Virtual Research Environment. (VRE). Students gave a rating of 3.7 to the statement ‘the summaries are accurate and fair’.

9.3 Outcomes

9.3.1 Feedback Loop

Feedback on action taken following the first consultation was posted to the forum, but no updates were given for the second consultation. Students gave a rating of 3.5 to the statement ‘updates on action taken as a result of consultation are timely’.

9.3.2 Influence

As no staff involved in the PG forum responded to the survey it is difficult to ascertain the level of influence the consultation/s have had. However, students gave a rating of 3.5 to the statement ‘I can see how consultation has affected decision making’.

9.3.3 Conclusions
Although the feedback from the few student volunteers involved in this forum has been positive, the low numbers of staff and students engaged in either consultation run on the PGRF and the lack of feedback from the University following the consultation on the topic of the VRE, suggests that there is not sufficient interest from staff or students to sustain the continuation of the PGRF.

Recommendation: The dedicated PG forum should be discontinued, but the option should remain for PG research students to be consulted with the support of SConsO should the Research, Scholarship and Quality unit require it. An option to consider is a once a year consultation similar to the approach taken with international students.

Recommendation PGRF-1: The dedicated PG forum should be discontinued. However, the option should remain for PG students to be consulted with the support of SConsO as appropriate, should the Research, Scholarship and Quality unit require it.

10. Disabled Students Consultative Forum

This online forum seeks and considers the views of students with disabilities on matters specifically affecting their study and student experience.

37 students involved in the Disabled Students Forum responded to the survey for volunteers involved in online consultative forums. Feedback below is from these students unless otherwise stated.

10.1 Inputs

10.1.1 Scheduling

The Disabled Students Forum ran from 14-27 September and lasted 13 days. 52% of students felt that the number of consultations had been ‘about the right amount’, while 36% felt that there had been ‘not quite enough’ and 12% that there had been ‘not nearly enough’. No students felt that there had been too many. 54% of students felt that the length of the consultation had been ‘about right’, while 43% felt that it had been ‘a bit too short’ and 3% that it had been ‘far too short’.

10.1.2 Topics

The consultation covered the following questions:

- Thinking about the last 12 months, how would you describe your experience of obtaining DSA support for your studies?
- What could the OU have done to enhance your experience of obtaining DSA support?
- If the OU could make just one change in the way it supports disabled students, what would you like to see?
- Have there been stages of your study journey when you needed more information, advice or guidance than we provided?
- Is there anything else you think we should consider?
Students gave a rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘the consultation topics are appropriate’; one student made a suggestion of having ‘more topics to cover more disabilities’.

10.1.3 Students

The consultation was advertised to all disabled students and 377 students signed up to participate. Of these, 122 (32%) students participated in the discussions. Students gave a rating of 3.9 to the statement ‘there is a good mix of students involved’.

10.2 Process

10.2.1 Questions and Information Provided

Students gave a rating of 3.7 to the statement ‘information about the consultation is provided at the right time’ and 3.8 to the statement ‘the background information allows me to provide an informed opinion’. Therefore it can be concluded that the background information provided was appropriate.

10.2.2 Contributions

During the consultation, 122 students posted at least once, and there were a total of 603 posts. The 3 most active students contributed 133 posts; the 5 most active students contributed 183 posts, which constitutes 22% and 30% respectively of the total number of posts.

10.2.3 Moderation

59% of students felt that the level of staff involvement in the forum had been ‘about right’, while 29% felt that there had been ‘not quite enough’ staff involvement, 9% that there had been ‘not nearly enough’ and 3% that there had been ‘much too much’ staff involvement in the forum. The statement ‘the forums are appropriately moderated’ elicited a rating of 3.9; therefore it can be concluded that the moderation of the Disabled Students Forum was at the right level.

10.2.4 Technology

As with the consultations run by the USCF, the Disabled Students forum is hosted on the OU’s VLE and is therefore subject to the same technological advantages and disadvantages as described in 4.2.5. Students gave the statement ‘the technology used enables effective consultation’ a rating of 3.5. One student commented that the one thing they would change would be to ‘improve access for those using assistive technology’.

10.2.5 Outputs

A summary of the consultation was posted 16 days after the forum closed; students gave a rating of 3.9 to the statement ‘the summary was accurate and fair’.
10.3 Outcomes

10.3.1 Feedback Loop

A response document was posted to the forum in March 16, and students gave a rating of 3.4 to the statement ‘Updates on action taken as a result of consultation are timely’.

10.3.2 Influence

Students gave a rating of 3.4 to the statement ‘I can see how consultation has affected decision making’.

10.3.3 Conclusions

The Disabled Students Forum was positively received by students with high ratings given in all areas of student feedback. However, it was not made clear to students how frequently consultations would take place in future, if at all.

Recommendation DSCF-1: The Disabled Students Consultative Forum should take place at least annually, with clearer communication to students of the intended frequency of meetings and an interim update on actions taken in response to feedback. This will help to manage student expectations of the level of activity and increase positive engagement.

11. Face-to-face Consultative Meetings and Online International Students Consultative Meeting

The English regions host annual gatherings for students to discuss issues face to face with staff and Associate Lecturer representatives. Ireland, Scotland and Wales have their own independent consultative processes which include face-to-face meetings on a similar basis to the English regional meetings. Notes from the English regional meetings are circulated to students who attended and published on the Students Association regional forums.

25 students involved in the Online International Students Consultative Meeting responded to the survey for volunteers involved in online consultative forums; 104 students who had attended the face-to-face meetings responded to the survey ‘OU Student Consultative Meetings 2016’. Feedback below is from these students as specified.

11.1 Inputs

The Open University Students Association invites all students to register to attend these meetings around eight weeks before the date of the meeting.
The OU Students Association nominates its (3-6) representatives and places are then allocated on a first-come-first served basis with no selection to make the invitees representative of the student body, with the aim of 20 students attending alongside some Open University staff including tutors.

11.1.1 Scheduling

The previous review evaluated the 13/14 regional meetings, and recommended that meetings should be scheduled across the year rather than in one short time period. This was not implemented for the 14/15 or 15/16 annual meetings, as the rationale for having all of the face-to-face meetings scheduled close together is to ensure that feedback can be collated in a timely fashion as all meetings discuss the same topics.

The SUMS review also recommended that the schedule of consultation should take into account examination and major submission timetables and avoid popular holiday periods, in order to increase engagement in individual consultations. This recommendation was applied, with the 15/16 face-to-face consultative meetings scheduled between February and May 2016, as detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Region / nation</th>
<th>Location of meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 27 February</td>
<td>The OU in London</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in the South</td>
<td>Oxford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 12 March</td>
<td>The OU in the West Midlands</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in the North West</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 9 April</td>
<td>The OU in the East of England</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in the South East</td>
<td>Brighton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 16 April</td>
<td>The OU in the East Midlands</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in the North</td>
<td>Gateshead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 23 April</td>
<td>The OU in the South West</td>
<td>Bristol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in Yorkshire</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 7 May</td>
<td>The OU in Wales</td>
<td>Cardiff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The OU in Scotland</td>
<td>Edinburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 14 May</td>
<td>The OU in Ireland</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 21 May</td>
<td>The OU in Ireland</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of staff who attended the face-to-face meetings felt that the date of the meeting was about right (3.8 rating).

69% of the students who had attended the face-to-face meetings and completed the ‘OU Student Consultative Meetings 2016’ survey felt that the length of the meeting was ‘about right’, while 21% felt that it had been ‘a bit too short’ and 4% that it had been ‘much too short’; 6% felt that it had been ‘a bit too long’. It can therefore be concluded that the length of the face-to-face meetings was appropriate.

The International Students Online Consultative Meeting was held on 20-27 April to align with the above schedule of face-to-face meetings. 52% of students felt that this forum was open for ‘about the right amount’ of time, while 44% felt that it was ‘a bit too short’ and 4% that it was ‘far too short’.

**Recommendation F2F-1**: The length of the International Students Online Consultative Meeting should be extended to 2 weeks.
11.1.2 Topics

To establish topics for the 15/16 meetings, both students and staff were invited to submit topics for consultation and there was a good range of both to consider. Staff submitted 14 possible topics and the student consultation forum received 27 topic proposals posted by 21 students, with 578 replies posted by 67 students. All students were invited to participate via a message on StudentHome and all student consultation volunteers were emailed an invitation to participate. No specific regional or national topics were proposed.

Feedback from the Students Association Central Executive Committee was used to inform discussion in the agenda-setting sub-group, which agreed the following three topics (which were designed to incorporate a number of the proposed topics):

1. Assessment;
2. Tuition; and
3. Supporting Student Success.

Feedback from staff on the timings of the agenda for the 15/16 meetings was mixed, with the statement ‘the timings of the agenda were about right’ eliciting a 3.7 accordance rating, and a rating of 3.8 for the statement ‘the format of the meeting enabled consultation’. However individual ratings for both statements ranged from 1-5, which suggests that the agenda was more successful at some meetings than others; this could be to do with variances in student contributions and the skills of the staff facilitating.

Staff gave a rating of 3.9 for the appropriateness of the topics, while students who had attended the face-to-face meetings gave a rating of 4.1 to the question ‘How appropriate did you find the agenda for the meeting?’ It can therefore be concluded that the topics on the agenda for the meeting were successfully selected and felt by both staff and students to be appropriate.

Students who attended the meetings and completed to the corresponding survey rated the individual topics as follows:

- Tuition: 4
- Assessment: 4
- Supporting Student Success: 3.9
- Nation update and strategy (Ireland and Scotland only): 3.6
- Business meeting and items for report (Scotland only): 3.3

International students were also invited to nominate topics for discussion at the International Students Consultative Meetings. Although a number of topics were suggested, most either aligned to the main topics above or were not suitable for inclusion; for example a popular topic was the issue of fees, which the University responded to directly in the consultation summary but felt had been covered sufficiently in other forums and would not be a constructive topic for consultation. It was also felt that it was important for the forum consultation to mirror as closely as possible the equivalent face-to-face meetings. A further thread was in place on the forum for students to raise any other issues. Students gave a rating of 3.8 to the statement ‘the consultation topics were appropriate’, although one student commented that ‘some of [the questions] seemed irrelevant, e.g. why ask us to assess tutorials when the OU’s stopped running them in Europe?’
In answer to what they would like to see on the agenda of future face-to-face meetings, 90% of
students advocated ‘consultation topics where you are invited to share your views’, 67% wanted
‘presentations where you hear about developments within the University’, 78% selected ‘question
and answer sessions where you get to ask about aspects of the student experience’ (students were
able to select more than one answer). Although ‘consultation topics where you are invited to share
your views’ was the most popular answer, several students echoed the following comment: ‘I don’t
want to just "share my views". I want OU to listen and change’.

Note: Nations set their own agendas incorporating as many of the consultation topics as they wished
alongside other business.

11.1.3 Students

The previous review recommended that enough students should be invited to ensure attendance is
between 20-24 students. This was actioned by the University offering 30 places at the 14/15
meetings to compensate for the high drop-out rate in the 13/14 meetings. The impact of this action
was that attendance at the 14/15 meetings was better than the previous year: in England, 172
students attended meetings in 14/15 compared to 124 in 13/14 with the number dropping out
falling from 40% to 30%. However, the May meetings were under-subscribed, possibly due to the
heavy exam period and EMA deadlines at the start of June.

The previous SUMS report recommended that communications concerning meetings need to be
across a variety of media including email, website, forums, programme literature and social media
sites, with the expectation that this would lead to increased awareness and increased participation.
SConsO responded that moving meetings may help recruitment, and that they would consider the
use of an online booking system e.g. Eventbrite. For the 15/16 meetings, the Students Association
contacted all students to invite them to sign up to attend the face-to-face meetings using an online
form; the meetings were publicised by the Students Association and SConsO to encourage
attendance and the recruitment process was administered by SConsO. 30 places were allocated on a
first-come-first-served basis to the early meetings, increasing as a trend of lower than expected
turnout became clear. While those wanting to register for the meetings was significantly up on last
year, the turnout of those who were offered a place was significantly down, with the number
dropping out rising from around 30% to around 55%.

Students for the Ireland, and Scotland and Wales meetings were recruited in the same way as for the
English regions.

The statement ‘The right number of students were involved in the meeting’ elicited an average
accordance rating of 2.8 and the ‘one thing’ the majority of students would change would be to
involve more/a better mix of students. Some staff commented that preference should be given to
students who have not previously been consulted, and that fewer Students Association
representatives should be involved in favour of more students who are not involved with the
Students Association.

The demographic breakdown of students expected at the face-to-face meetings is below (this relates
to all students expected, not those who actually attended which was a smaller number).

- **Age**: In general, those expected at the meetings were more likely to be aged 35 or older.
  Those aged under 17, 18-21 and 35-44 were accurately represented to within a differential
margin of <1%; 22-44 year olds were under-represented by 3.7% and those 45 and over were over-represented by 4.1%.

- **Ethnicity**: The majority of ethnic minorities were accurately represented to within a margin of <1%. The category ‘White British’ was under-represented by 11.5%, ‘White English’ by 1.5% and ‘White Scottish’ by 2.6%; while the category ‘White Irish’ was over-represented by 3.6% and ‘Black or Black British – African’ by 3.5%.

- **Length of time with OU**: Overall, students expected at the meetings were slightly more likely to have studied with the OU for more than 5 years. Those who began their first presentation less than 2 years ago were over-represented by 2.1%, however those whose first presentation was 2-5 year ago were under-represented by 5.3% and those who had been with the OU for 5 years or more were over-represented by 3.3%.

- **Gender**: Statistically, men were accurately represented and women were under-represented by 4.1%; however this is attributable to the 5% of students whose gender information is not held by the University.

- **Nationality**: The vast majority of nationalities were accurately represented by those expected at the meetings, with the exception of Ireland, which was over-represented by 3.3%.

- **Sexual Orientation and Marital Status**: as with demographic data for the online forums, it is difficult to draw conclusion on these characteristics due to the large proportion of students for whom the University does not hold this information.

- **Religious Belief**: Those students expected at meetings who profess to a specific religion are broadly representative, with the exception of Christians of no particular denomination who were over-represented by 5.2%.

- **Subject Area**: All subject areas were broadly representative, with no subject deviating in representation from the general population more than 3.5% (these being Science and Arts & Humanities, both of which were over-represented by 3.5%).

- **Disability**: There are 130 unique disabled students included in those expected at the face-to-face meetings.

The majority of demographics were broadly represented by those expected at the meetings; the area least representative being age. It is recommended that for the 16/17 meetings, students be allocated places in line with the selection criteria for the USCF.

Although there were more applications for places at the face-to-face meetings than previously, 47% of students who responded to the General Student Survey were unaware of the opportunities to take part in face-to-face consultations. It is therefore recommended to publicise more widely across a variety of channels the opportunity to take part in face-to-face consultations (see recommendation USCF-18), although it should be noted that all eligible students were emailed directly about these consultative meetings which is not the case for online consultation forums, where awareness is higher. This suggests that direct emails are not a singular solution for engaging students.

International students were recruited via a message on StudentHome as well as direct emails inviting them to register; for this consultation a rating of 3.9 was given to the statement ‘there was a good mix of students involved’.

**11.2 Process**
11.2.1 Questions

A recommendation was made in the previous review for the University to provide an opportunity at meetings for a ‘student surgery’ for students who wish to raise personal issues, with the expectation that this would improve the quality of dialogue by focusing the discussion on the topics at hand. In addition, the report recommended that the University should ensure that staff are in attendance who can answer questions on topics under discussion.

A student surgery was not considered practicable, as it was felt that this would detract from the topics under consultation and raise student expectations for interactions that are not an appropriate part of a formal consultation process. Students due to attend the meetings were explicitly told that the face-to-face consultations are not an opportunity to raise personal situations or complaints and were redirected to the Complaints process. This action had positive impact on the 14/15 meetings as SConsO reported that there was less domination by individual concerns and that students engaged proactively with the subject matter.

In 15/16 a dedicated Q&A session was held as part of the agenda, and students who attended the meetings gave a rating of 3.5 in response to the question ‘how useful did you think the Q&A session was?’ A number of comments in response to the free-text question ‘Do you have any other comments, questions, concerns or suggestions for improvement?’ suggested that the Q&A session should be longer; other students recommended it being placed after the main topical discussions.

Feedback from students on the Q&A session included:

- The Q and A was far too short! We only had time for one question
- The Q&A would be best off at the end, perhaps as an "any other business" section. Otherwise it’s difficult to know whether a question we have is more suitable as part of the actual consultation or not.
- More time for Q & A session as many things came up there was not enough time to discuss in enough depth

However, staff reported that in most instances any students who had a question was given the opportunity to ask it, and they were not overwhelmed by questions.

11.2.2 Information Provided

A recommendation made in the previous review was to publish the agenda and background information prior to the meetings, in order to enable prior consideration of topics and improve the quality of discussion. Also to set expectations for participants on levels of influence, availability of outputs and breadth of topics. This is in place and covered by presentation and by background reading, which is sent out just over two weeks before the meeting.

Students who attended the meetings gave a rating of 3.6 to the usefulness of the background reading; 77% felt that the amount of background reading provided was ‘about right’, while 13% felt that it was ‘too little’ and 11% that it was ‘too much’. Although some students commented that they did not receive the background information in enough advance of the meeting, this could be due to the fact that in response to student withdrawals places were offered at times at short notice.

Comments from students on this issue include:

- More written material should be supplied in printed form - on this occasion there was none - prior to the meeting
- Didn’t receive all the pre reading. This was an issue, it’s a good job I read fast.
- Paperwork was not received early enough prior to the meeting especially the results of last year’s meeting which would have been very helpful
Staff attending the meetings were largely satisfied that Information provided about their role at the meeting was helpful and timely (rated 3.7).

International students gave a rating of 3.7 to the statement ‘Information about the consultation was provided at the right time’ and 3.4 to ‘the background information allowed me to provide an informed opinion’; one student commented that ‘posting facts and figures on student numbers and fees as part of the background info would have been helpful’.

11.2.3 Contributions

Staff in attendance at the face-to-face meetings gave an average accordance rating of 2.9 to the statement ‘The meeting(s) included a good mix of students’, and 3.8 to the statement ‘The student input was of high quality’. This suggests that although the students in attendance provided good contributions, this could be improved by including more students in the discussions. This is supported by feedback given by students who attended the meetings, a number of whom commented on the high numbers of non-attenders, leading to the feeling that ‘more students would enable more fertile discussions.’ A small number of students commented that the students who attended were a ‘self-selective’ group that was ‘not representative of OU students - there was a strong feel that the people present preferred to attend lectures and have face to face, it seems there would be a strong bias as this was a meeting of people who had attended the face to face element of the consultation’.

The question ‘To what extent were you able to share your opinions?’ elicited an approval rating from students of 4.1, however a number of students commented that there was not enough time allocated to adequately discuss each topic, and that sessions therefore felt ‘rushed’. 34% of students felt that there was enough time for discussion, while 30% felt that there was not quite enough time and 12% that there was not nearly enough time for discussion. This compares to 19% who felt that there was a bit too much time and 5% who felt there was far too much time for discussion. Student feedback on this issue includes:

- These consultations are well worth attending, but...there is not enough time to have a proper discussion and ask questions.
- There was too little time to discuss some of the matters and I believe the OU did not get all the available feedback including some key ideas.
- Too many items on the agenda for meaningful discussion.
- There simply wasn’t enough time to consider all the topics.

**Recommendation F2F-2**: Ensure adequate time is allocated to each question to allow for meaningful discussion – either by extending the meeting or reducing the number of topics on the agenda.

60 students participated in the Online International Students Consultative Meeting and there were 309 posts; this compares to 73 students and 378 posts in 2015 and 87 students and over 350 posts in 2014.

11.2.4 Facilitation
A recommendation from the previous review was for the University to ensure that in order to improve the quality of the meeting discussions, there should be staff present with specific facilitation experience, who are independent of the topics for consultation and who can moderate dominant voices.

Staff facilitators could provide additional information and context at regional meetings if they were involved in the consultation topics.

The statement ‘The consultation was appropriately facilitated’ was given an average accordance rating of 4.3; however the individual ratings ranged from 2-5. This suggests that the actions taken to improve the facilitation of the face to face meetings have been successful, however there are still areas for improvement and sharing of best practice.

Students who attended the meetings also gave a rating of 4.3 for the facilitation of the meetings, with individual ratings ranging from 1-5, and 4.2 for the overall administration for the event (again with individual ratings ranging from 1-5). Although there were a small number of comments from students that facilitators ‘rushed’ the sessions, this can largely be attributed to time allocated to discussion on the agenda, rather than poor facilitation. Feedback from students on the facilitation of the meetings included:

- Not enough time was allowed to discuss topics. Member of OU staff on my table pushed discussion along to fast for adequate discussion before feeding back to chair person.
- The staff were fantastic and really engaged with us and the short sharp sessions kept it all very interesting!
- It would have helped to have the front team leading the meeting more gender balanced and a little less formal. However, the meeting was well conducted.

One issue that was raised by a number of students which impacted on the successful facilitation of the meetings was the set-up of the rooms used:

- The way we were seated and arranged meant that some people at the front were unaware that people further behind were waiting to have their say.
- The room could have been laid out better. It was difficult to see/hear everyone who spoke. Did not feel like a total group. Separate tables of 5 groups.
- Just all a bit "rushed" and not enough time given to each subject. The table layout may not have helped. These days things are done "In The Round."

**Recommendation F2F-3**: SConsO should consider the meetings which were most successfully facilitated/set out and extend these practices for future meetings.

76% of international students felt that the level of staff involvement in the consultation had been ‘about right’ and a rating of 4 was given to the statement ‘the forum was appropriately moderated’; therefore no changes are recommended to the level of moderation required at the Online International Students Consultative Meeting.

### 11.2.5 Technology

The face-to-face meetings do not rely on technology as do the online forums; therefore technological issues are less significant to these consultations. However, a recommendation made
by the USCE review sub-group is for the University to consider including an online element to the face-to-face meetings for those who are unable to attend in person.

The Online International Students Consultative Meeting is hosted on the OU’s VLE and as such are subject to the same technological advantages and disadvantages as described in 4.2.5; students gave a rating of 3.3 to the statement ‘the technology used enables effective consultation’.

11.2.6 Outputs

A recommendation from the last review was for the meetings to be summarised quickly (on the day if possible) to allow early comment on a draft summary before publication, with the aim of improving the quality of output from the meeting, and increasing engagement in the long term.

This recommendation was not implemented for the 15/16 meetings; responsibility for writing and circulating the meeting notes lies with the hosting region or nation and the timeliness of the publication of notes has been inconsistent. Although staff who attended the face-to-face meetings felt that the summary notes were accurate and fair (4.3 rating), quality has been varied. This issue is addressed in the proposed role description for the meeting administrator, which clearly sets out the responsibilities and timescales required.

Recommendation F2F-4: Responses from the University to feedback given at the 15/16 consultative meetings should be communicated to all students. This should include a news item to students regarding feedback on StudentHome.

11.3 Outcomes

11.3.1 Feedback Loop

SConsO intends to work closely with the areas of the University who ‘own’ the consultation topics to ensure an adequate response, including a publication of this response to students, as early as possible in the autumn. This will include the summary from the online international consultation on the same topics.

11.3.2 Influence

Although it is not possible to assess the influence of the 15/16 meetings at this stage, a booklet was produced following the 14/15 meetings providing detail of feedback given by students at the meetings, alongside the response from the University explaining what action had been taken as a result of the consultation.

Recommendation F2F-5: to implement the following proposals made by the Executive sub-group:

- In addition to the Nations’ consultative meetings there should be two ‘sets’ of face-to-face consultative meetings (e.g. spring and autumn);
- Each set of meetings should include 5 meetings in easily accessible, geographically diverse locations;
Meetings should aim to have 30 students attending and be (over)subscribed to ensure optimum attendance;
• The format of the meetings should allow for smaller group discussions as currently, with a possible online component to be further explored.

11.3.3 Conclusions

Staff gave the statement ‘The process was more effective than last year (if applicable)’ an average accordance rating of 3.9, and ‘meeting was a good use of my time’ was given a rating of 4; students who attended the meetings gave an overall satisfaction rating of 4.2 for the face-to-face consultations. It can therefore be concluded that although feedback from students and staff have highlighted areas for improvement, the 2016 face-to-face meetings were successful and in most areas demonstrated an improvement on previous years.

Staff and students who completed the online volunteer survey felt that the future format of consultations should be:
• Face-to-face: 58% (staff); 42% (students)
• Virtual (asynchronous): 8% (staff); 21% (students)
• Virtual (synchronous): 8% (staff); 24% (students)
• Other: 27% (staff); 14% (students)
• Half a day in length: 60% (staff); 31% (students)
• A whole day in length: 40% (staff); 24% (students)
• Don’t mind length: 46% (students)

The majority of who selected a format of ‘other’ specified that the OU should have consultations in each of the three given formats.

The following average accordance ratings were given to the statements below:
• Face-to-face student consultative meetings continue to be part of the student consultative structures: 4.8 (staff); 3.9 (students)
• Meetings are held close to students (i.e. within a 2 hour journey if possible): 4.5 (staff); 3.8 (students)
• Meetings are held at locations with good transport links: 4.8 (staff); 4.1 (students)
• Senior University staff participate: 4.6 (staff); 4.1 (students)
• Meetings are held at the Open University’s locations in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Manchester, Milton Keynes and Nottingham: 3.5 (staff); 3.2 (students)
• More students have the opportunity to attend: 4.7 (staff); 4.1 (students)
• Students are involved in setting the agenda: 4.6 (staff); 4.1 (students)
• There is flexibility in which meeting you can apply to attend: 4.1 (students)

In response to the General Student Survey question ‘how useful do you think face-to-face meetings are for enabling the University to hear students’ opinions?’ 25% of students stated ‘very useful’, 50% stated ‘useful’, 23% stated ‘to some extent useful’ and 2% ‘not at all useful’.

From this it is clear that continuing to hold face-to-face consultative meetings is important to staff and to students, with having a good mix of as many engaged students as possible at the meetings being of key importance. It is therefore more important to hold meetings in accessible locations than
in OU offices. Staff also felt strongly that senior University staff should participate in the meetings (VC, PVC and Executive Deans were specified in comments).

**Recommendation F2F-6:** There should be two staff roles at the face-to-face meetings as set out in Appendix 2.
12. Appendices

12.1 Appendix 1: All Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USCF</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-1</strong>: The pool of student volunteers should be doubled to 200, and should reflect the current student profile in relation to age, qualification level, nation and subject area and to be over-represented in relation to widening access criteria students and ‘new regime’ students.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-2</strong>: There should be a trial and evaluation of at least one bespoke consultation which would not call on the existing student volunteers but recruit either from the student body as a whole or from the segment of the student body appropriate to the consultation topic.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-3</strong>: There should be a trial to lengthen a small number of consultations to 3 weeks, with this to be extended if the impact is a significant increase in participation.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-4</strong>: Student involvement in University projects that affect the student experience should be mandatory (via at least one of the following options: students as project team members; forum consultation; student survey or focus group/workshop). The OU project management delivery methodology should be amended to reflect this.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-5</strong>: Students should continue to be encouraged to nominate topics for consultation and the University Students Consultative Executive should consider taking at least 5 student-nominated topics forward for consultation each year.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-6</strong>: Consultations should have questions where there is more room for open discussion, with less detail, and should normally take place at the divergent stage of a project to avoid consulting on the detail of recommendations that have already been formulated. However, care should be taken to ensure that questions do not become abstract and vague. This advice should be included in the guidance for topic initiators, and the quality of background information and questions should be carefully monitored by the Executive.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-7</strong>: SConsO should review guidance to include simplified ‘headline’ information for potential student volunteers, to manage expectations of what is required of them, and in particular, to counter the dominance of some discussions by a small number of students, there should be new guidance on the importance of stepping back from the discussion at times and allowing others to contribute. Guidance on managing dominant voices should also be included in briefing and training for moderators.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-8</strong>: SconsO should ensure that the volunteers recruited are representative of the general student population to within a 5% difference; exceptions can be made in areas of positive discrimination as appropriate.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-9</strong>: SconsO should update the staff membership categories of the USCF in line with changes in the organisation and management of the University.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-10</strong>: A link to ‘Consultation Forums’ should be placed on the StudentHome page.</td>
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<td><strong>Recommendation USCF-11</strong>: SConsO should set up a ‘student consultation’ email list so that all students with an interest in student consultation can be regularly updated about opportunities for involvement and responses to feedback through an e-newsletter.</td>
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<td>Recommendation USCF-12:</td>
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<td>Recommendations USCF-22:</td>
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### SST Forums (and Open Degree Forum)

**Recommendation SST-1:** Guidance on consultation aimed at SST leads should be more widely publicised across SSTs.

**Recommendation SST-2:** Consultations should take place only when appropriate and not to achieve the right ‘quota’. Students be able to propose consultation topics.

**Recommendation SST-3:** Where updates on action taken following consultation are given, SSTs should ensure that these are clearly communicated to students.

**Recommendation SST-4:** The level of post-consultation communication from organisers to those involved should be improved, providing updates on progress and information on those suggestions that have been considered but not taken forward (with an accompanying explanation) as well as information on where consultation feedback has had a direct impact.

**Recommendation SST-5:** Subject to approval by the Executive Deans each Board of Studies should have a Student Forum through which it will be expected to consult students at appropriate points in the cycle of meetings. It is proposed that the Chair of the Board of Studies and the Board of Studies Manager should be responsible for working with colleagues in the Faculty to identify topics for consultation arrange for the forums to be moderated and ensure summaries of discussions and ‘You said we did’ responses are provided to close the feedback loop. The Student Consultation Office would support the process by recruiting students setting up forums publicising the consultations and providing moderators from the volunteer pool if none are available from within the Faculty.

It is also recommended that if they wish individual SSTs could continue to have consultations with their students but this should not be mandatory. As now, the Student Consultation Office would support SSTs that wished to have consultations.

### Postgraduate Research Students Forum

**Recommendation PGRF-1:** The dedicated PG forum should be discontinued. However, the option should remain for PG students to be consulted with the support of SConsO as appropriate, should the Research, Scholarship and Quality unit require it.

### Disabled Students Forum
**Recommendation DSCF-1:** The Disabled Students Consultative Forum should take place at least annually, with clearer communication to students of the intended frequency of meetings and an interim update on actions taken in response to feedback. This will help to manage student expectations of the level of activity and increase positive engagement.

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### Face-to-Face Meetings (and Online International Students Consultative Meeting)

**Recommendation F2F-1:** The length of the International Students Online Consultative Meeting should be extended to 2 weeks.

**Recommendation F2F-2:** Ensure adequate time is allocated to each question to allow for meaningful discussion – either by extending the meeting or reducing the number of topics on the agenda.

**Recommendation F2F-3:** SConsO should consider the meetings which were most successfully facilitated/set out and extend these practices for future meetings.

**Recommendation F2F-4:** Responses from the University to feedback given at the 15/16 consultative meetings should be communicated to all students. This should include a news item to students regarding feedback on StudentHome.

**Recommendation F2F-5:** To implement the following proposals made by the Executive sub-group:
- In addition to the Nations’ consultative meetings there should be two ‘sets’ of face-to-face consultative meetings (e.g. spring and autumn);
- Each set of meetings should include 5 meetings in easily accessible, geographically diverse locations;
- Meetings should aim to have 30 students attending and be (over)subscribed to ensure optimum attendance;
- The format of the meetings should allow for smaller group discussions as currently, with a possible online component to be further explored.

**Recommendation F2F-6:** There should be two staff roles at the face-to-face meetings as set out in Appendix 2.
12.2 Appendix 2: Roles for Face-to-Face Meetings

Consultative meeting facilitator—role description
The consultative meeting facilitator is responsible for running the face-to-face student consultative meeting and providing a worthwhile experience for all participants.

Role requirements
The facilitator should impart a sense of energy and enthusiasm to students and staff, give the meeting a sense of purpose, motivate students to get all they can from the experience, and help create an open and friendly environment where students feel free to express their views and that their views will make a difference. The role requirements vary according to the needs of the meeting, but are likely to include:

In the week before the meeting
- Gain an understanding of the programme and aims of the meeting by making yourself familiar with materials supplied by the Student Consultation Office and attend an online briefing session.

On the day of the meeting
During the meeting
- Start on time and introduce the meeting, covering the agenda for the day and housekeeping matters
- Conduct and facilitate activities and exercises as specified in the agenda for the meeting
- Pace the meeting and observe specified time limits for agenda items
- Ensure that, for group work activities, a facilitator and spokesperson is appointed within each group
- Encourage students' active involvement and participation by helping to create an environment in which all feel able to contribute
- Help students improve their understanding of the issues under discussion
- Be sensitive to students' needs, especially those of students with additional requirements
- Be aware of and act in accordance with the University's equal opportunity policy and its code of practice on bullying and harassment
- Summarise conclusions or decisions at the end of each discussion topic
- Formally close the meeting, thanking everyone for attending and contributing, and making it clear what will happen next

After the meeting
- Review minutes of the meeting provided by the Consultative meeting administrator and return them to the administrator within 3-4 days

Person specification
The duties and responsibilities we’ve described give rise to the following general requirements:
- Excellent group facilitation skills;
- An understanding of the OU student journey and student experience;
- Awareness of external factors in the HE sector affecting the OU;
- An ability to work with students from diverse educational, cultural and work backgrounds;
- An understanding of (and commitment) to equal opportunity policy and practices;
- A commitment to student-centred learning and teaching;
- An organised and systematic approach to work;
- Ability to work successfully both independently and in a team.

**Contract**
Staff undertaking this role will be paid for one day’s work at the Day Contract payment rate which is currently £128.66 per day (excluding National Insurance), plus travel and subsistence.

**Consultative meeting administrator – role description**
The consultative meeting administrator provides administrative support to the meeting facilitator to help ensure the smooth running of the meeting. These tasks are mainly carried out on the day of the meeting at the venue and involve carrying out administrative tasks, dealing with student enquiries, liaising with the venue, and taking meeting notes.

**Role requirements**
The role requirements may vary according to the needs of the meeting, but will include:

**In the week before the meeting**
- Attend an online meeting with facilitator of consultative meeting and representative of Student Consultation Office to finalise arrangements for the day

**On the day before the meeting**
- Download from SharePoint site attendance list of students and staff to take to the meeting
- Create name badges based on attendance list of students and staff
- Download from SharePoint site copy of briefing materials sent to students and make photocopies to take to meeting
- Save from SharePoint copy of PowerPoint Presentations and handouts onto a memory stick to take to the meeting

**On the day of meeting**
**Before the meeting starts**
- Check that venue has set up meeting rooms, catering, equipment, flip charts, markers and other supplies etc. as requested and resolve any issues that arise
- Load PowerPoint presentations onto pc
- Meet the students and staff when they arrive, ensuring they are properly registered
- Deal with queries from students, staff and representatives from the venue
- Have extra copies of the agenda and background information available

**During the meeting**
- Take notes of the discussions, recording decisions and action points
- Support the facilitator in time-keeping for sessions, where requested, to ensure meeting does not overrun

**After the meeting**
- Send attendance list to Student Consultation Office
- Collate student and staff expense claims handed in, ensuring expenses claim forms have receipts attached where appropriate, and return to Student Consultation Office
- Write minutes of the meeting within 3-4 days, and ask the facilitator to review them as a correct record; then send them to the Student Consultation Office with 10 working days of the meeting
Person specification
In addition to the role requirements described above, there are the following personal requirements:

- Excellent communication, organisation, and interpersonal skills
- Flexibility and ability to work effectively in a small team
- Good IT skills and knowledge of Microsoft PowerPoint, Word, Excel and Outlook
- Ability to work in a professional way with students and staff
- Ability to think and act quickly and prioritise tasks
- Ability to work with students from diverse educational, cultural and work backgrounds
- An understanding of and commitment to equal opportunity policy and practices
- Respect for others' feelings while working in close proximity

Contract
Staff undertaking this role will be paid for one day’s work at the Day Contract payment rate which is currently £128.66 per day (excluding National Insurance), plus travel and subsistence.
12.3 Appendix 3: TORs for Forums

12.3.1 USCF TORs

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Terms of reference
To seek and consider students' views on matters affecting their study at the Open University.

Membership
1. A core of OUSA Students Association representatives to include representatives of OUSA Students Association central (three students), each of the four UK Nations (four students), Faculty Association representatives (five students) and international students (two students).
2. One student volunteer from each SST consultative forum (seventeen students), one student volunteer from the Open Degree Student Consultative Forum and one student volunteer from the Postgraduate Research Students Consultative Forum.
3. All student representatives on the various committees that make up the University and Faculty governance structure (approx. thirty eighty students).
4. Up to one two hundred student volunteers prepared to make a commitment to participate for the duration of one year.
5. The OU staff ‘in attendance’ will include a majority of student-facing staff, including AL representatives, and will also include some senior members of staff from across the University:
   • One representative of Student Registration & Fees nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of Marketing nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of Learning and Teaching Solutions unit (LTS) nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of the Learning and Teaching Centre nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of each Faculty, nominated by the Dean and Director of Studies Executive Dean
   • A senior member of University staff with an overview of Student Support Teams.
   • One representative of the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships(CICP) unit nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of the Academic Policy and Governance unit nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative of the Library nominated by the Head of Unit
   • One representative from each of the sub-units in Student Academic Services nominated by the Student Academic Services Leadership Team, at least one of whom should be a member of the Student Academic Services Leadership Team.
   • Four AL representatives from the AL Executive
   • Other staff, with appropriate expertise, co-opted as members for specific discussion items.

Mode of operation
1. The forum will operate online. All OU staff and students will have view only access to the forum, with members only being able to contribute to discussions.
2. Students will be recruited for one year with places allocated on a first-come-first-basis, but with adjustments made to enable the forum to reflect the current student profile in relation to age.
qualification level, nation and subject area and to be over-represented in relation to widening access criteria students and ‘new regime’ students.

3. Each forum topic will be moderated by a member of staff allocated by the Student Consultation Office.

4. It will be open to the forum to run broader consultations on any particular topic or issue, which might take a variety of forms dependent on time available, importance and focus. Such broader consultations might involve short term, online asynchronous or synchronous opportunities for students either across the student body or targeted to the particular interest groups concerned to provide evidence, comments, and participate in discussion on the matter in hand.

5. The OU and OUSA Students Association will jointly run a major publicity campaign to promote student involvement and the Student Consultation Office will manage the process of appointing student volunteers on a ‘first come, first served’ basis.

6. The agenda for the forum is determined by the University Students Consultative Executive, who will ensure that there is a mechanism for individual students to raise topics for discussion and that a number of these are taken forward.

7. Reasonable notice will be given to members of the timing of online consultation on specified topics. The Student Consultation Office will endeavour to put together a schedule of consultations that can be notified to students well as much in advance as possible, while maintaining the flexibility to accommodate consultations at shorter notice.

8. If a member of a forum stands down or is no longer eligible to be a member then their place will be filled either from a waiting list or through further recruitment.

9. The Student Consultation Office is responsible for publishing a draft summary of each consultation shortly after within 15 working days of its conclusion for comment by students and a final summary one week later.

10. The Student Consultation Office is responsible for ensuring that a timely response is published to students letting them know how their views have been acted upon, or plans to act upon them are planned to be acted on, and if not, why not.

12.3.2 Boards of Study TORs

BOARD OF STUDIES STUDENT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Terms of reference

1. Each Board of Studies will have an online student consultative forum.

2. All aspects of the student experience within the scope of the Board of Studies may be the subject of consultation with students.

3. Students may at any time raise issues which they want the Student Consultative Forum to discuss.

Membership

1. Chair of Board of Studies ‘in attendance’
2. Board of Studies Manager ‘in attendance’
3. SST Lead in ‘attendance’
4. Other Faculty staff ‘in attendance’ as required by the consultation topics
5. Student volunteers meeting criteria relevant to the consultation recruited from the student body for each consultation topic by the Student Consultation Office
6. One Associate Lecturer representatives ‘in attendance’ appointed by the Associate Lecturer Executive from within the AL Faculty representatives
7. Up to ten representatives nominated by the Students Association including Students Association representatives on the Board of Studies

Mode of Operation

1. Every Board of Studies will have a Student Consultative Forum.
2. Consultations will be conducted via an asynchronous online forum.
3. The Chair of the Board of Studies is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the student experience within the scope of the Board of Studies are considered for consultation with students.
4. Forum members may at any time raise issues which they would like discussed on the forum through an open thread on the online forum. At least one student-nominated topic should be taken forward for consultation within each academic year.
5. The Chair of the Board of Studies and Board of Studies Manager will arrange for Faculty staff to moderate the Student Consultative Forum.
6. The Faculty, Student Consultation Office and Open University Students Association will jointly promote membership of the Student Consultative Forum.
7. The Student Consultation Office will manage recruitment and notifications to students for each Board of Studies Student Consultative Forum consultation.
8. The Chair of the Board of Studies and Board of Studies Manager are responsible for publishing a summary and response to each consultation on the Student Consultative Forum within three months of the consultation detailing how they have acted on student comments, or if not, why not.

12.3.3 Open Degree TORs

OPEN DEGREE STUDENT CONSULTATIVE FORUM

Terms of reference

1. To seek and consider the views of BA/BSc Open Degree students on matters affecting their study at the Open University.

Membership

1. Individual student volunteers—all BA/BSc Open Degree students to be invited to participate on a first come, first served basis. There will be 100 places in total, within which there will be separate quotas for ‘new framework’ and ‘old framework’ students with the aim of parity of membership who are studying for the BA/BSc Open Degree (with qualification code QD or BD) will be invited to register for specific consultations.
2. Open Programme Director Chair, Manager and Project Officer for the Open Board of Studies ‘in attendance’.
3. Up to four OU Students Association representatives, plus the OU Students Association representative on the Open Programme Committee Board of Studies.
4. Up to two Associate Lecturer representatives, including the Associate Lecturer representative on Open Programme Committee Board of Studies, ‘in attendance’.

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5. Other staff ‘in attendance’, with appropriate expertise, co-opted for specific discussion items e.g. Open SST specialists, OPWG members, staff from Nations.

Mode of Operation

1. The forum will operate online.
2. All aspects of the provision of the BA/BSc Open Degree may be the subject of consultation with students.
3. All OU staff and students will have view only access to the forum, with members only being able to contribute to discussions.
4. Members to be emailed will be recruited to take part in specific consultations (e.g. according to topic, and including representation from old/new framework students studying both for BD and QD qualifications as appropriate) immediately in advance of the consultation.
5. It is expected that there will be one or two consultations per year.
6. The Open Programme Team qualifications management team will appoint moderators for the consultations taking place on the forum.
7. The agenda for the forum is determined by Open qualifications management team Programme Team, based on consultation with representatives from the OU Students Association and the Student Consultation Office and with the Open Programme Working Group, the Open Board of Studies and Open SST specialists as appropriate — and agreed by and possible within timescales the Open Programme Committee.
8. The Student Consultation Office will manage the process of appointing individual student volunteers to specific consultations.
9. Members will serve on the forum for one year.
10. Reasonable notice will be given to members of the timing of online consultation and on specified topics.
11. Any relevant accompanying material relating to the forum topic will be provided by the Open qualifications management team Programme Team.
12. The Open qualifications management team Programme team will be responsible for publishing a summary of each consultation on the forum and a timely response detailing how they have acted on, or plan to act upon student comments, or if not why not, within three months of the consultation.
13. Students may at any time raise specific issues which they want to discuss through an open thread on the forum.
14. The University Students Consultative Executive may refer items to the Open qualifications management team Programme Team to consider for consultation through the Forum, where appropriate.

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1 Open Degree students are spread across all undergraduate SSTs, based on their first module studied. Therefore each of these SSTs has an Open Programme at least one ‘specialist’ responsible for supporting students on Open qualifications.
2 The Open Programme Working Group consists of senior academics from each Faculty to act as a conduit between the Open Programme qualifications management team and each Faculty.
15. The Forum will be included in the scope of the annual effectiveness review of student consultative processes carried out by the Student Consultation Office on behalf of the University Students Consultative Executive.

12.3.4 DSCF TORs

UNIVERSITY ONLINE DISABLED STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE FORUM MEETING

Terms of reference

To seek and consider the views of students with disabilities on matters specifically affecting their study and student experience.

Membership

1. All disabled students are invited to register to participate.
2. Vice President Student Support, Open University Students Association (OUSA).
3. Vice President Equal Opportunities, Open University Students Association.
4. Chair of the OUSA Disabled Students Group.
5. Two representatives of Widening Access and Success Services, nominated by the Assistant Director, Widening Access and Success Services.
6. Other staff, with appropriate expertise, co-opted as members for specific discussion items.

Mode of operation

1. The Student Consultation Office will organise the online meeting which will run for two weeks once a year.
2. The forum will operate online. All OU staff and students will have view only access to the forum. Only with disabled students who have registered to participate, relevant Students Association representatives and staff ‘in attendance’ only being will be able to contribute to discussions.
3. The Student Consultation Office and the Students Association will jointly promote the opportunity for disabled students to participate in the meeting with a good level of notice. Disabled students will be invited to register to join the forum and notified of forthcoming consultations.
4. Each forum topic will be moderated by members of staff allocated by the Student Consultation Office.
5. The agenda for the forum is determined by Widening Access and Success Services, who will work with the Student Consultation Office and the Open University Students Association (OUSA) to ensure that there is a mechanism for individual students to raise topics for discussion and for taking these forward.
6. Reasonable notice will be given to students of the timing of online consultation on specified topics. The Student Consultation Office will endeavour to put together a schedule of consultations that can be notified to students well in advance, while maintaining the flexibility to accommodate consultations at shorter notice.
7. The Student Consultation Office is responsible for publishing a draft summary of each consultation shortly after its conclusion for comment by students.
7. Widening Access and Success Services and the Student Consultation Office are responsible for ensuring that a timely response is published to students letting them know how their views have been acted upon, or plans to act upon them are planned to be acted on, and if not, why not.

### 12.3.5 F-2-F TORs

**OU Student Consultative Meetings in English Regions**

**Terms of reference**

There will annually be one annual up to 10 face-to-face event student consultative meetings in easily accessible, geographically diverse locations in England each of the English regions, hosted by the Assistant Director, Student Services (ADSS), so that students can discuss matters relating to their student experience.

**Attendance**

1. Twenty Thirty students from the region, which may include up to four representatives from outside the region, including up to four representatives of the Students Association
2. Up to five AL Assembly members resident in the region ‘in attendance’.
3. Assistant Director, Student Services (Chair) The consultative meeting facilitator
4. The consultative meeting administrator
5. University and Students Association staff ‘in attendance’ as appropriate.
6. Up to five staff located in the Regional Centre ‘in attendance’ appropriate to the discussion items on the agenda.
7. At least one member of OUSA staff ‘in attendance’ where possible.

**Mode of operation**

1. The annual meeting should be held in the Regional Centre if possible, with meetings for each region staggered as far as possible to reduce the number that will take place at the same time. Meetings will take place in up to 10 easily accessible, geographically diverse locations in England, with the expectation that there will up to five in the Spring and up to five in the autumn.
2. Students are normally expected to participate in the meeting for their home region only nearest to their home and a cap will be set on claimable expense for students choosing to attend a meeting further from home, based on the cost of them attending the closest meeting to their home.
3. Students will be recruited for one meeting with places allocated on a first-come-first-basis, but with adjustments made to enable the meeting to reflect as far as possible the current student profile in relation to age, qualification level and subject area and to be over-represented in relation to widening access criteria students and ‘new regime’ students. Preference will be given to students who have not previously attended a student consultative meeting.
4. The meeting will be chaired by the Assistant Director, Student Services (ADSS) and the secretariat will be provided by the Regional Centre consultative meeting facilitator and administered by the consultative meeting administrator who will both be appointed by the Student Consultation Office.
5. The agenda for the meeting will be agreed by a sub-group of the University Students Consultative Executive including representatives of the Student Consultation Office and the Students Association.

6. Students Association representatives, individual students and relevant parts of the University will have the opportunity to propose issues to the agenda-setting group that they would like to be addressed in the meeting.

7. The Student Consultation Office will liaise with relevant parts of the University and the Students Association to produce the content of the meeting and provide a briefing for the facilitators.

8. The Student Consultation Office in consultation with OUSA the Students Association will be responsible for following up issues arising from these meetings that could usefully be discussed with a wider cross-section of students by further discussion in one or more of the online forums consider whether there should be a complementary synchronous or asynchronous online element to the consultation topics.

9. Notes from the meeting will be circulated to students and published on the OUSA regional forum.

10. The Student Consultation Office will be responsible for following up issues raised at the meetings and reporting back to students how their comments have been acted on, and if not, why not.

11. Venue hire, hospitality, and student travel and subsistence, facilitator and administrator costs will be charged to the Student Consultation Office. Associate Lecturer travel and subsistence costs will be charged to the AL Representation Office. Venue hire costs will be met by the Regional Centre. Any Regional staff costs and travel and subsistence costs will be met by the Regional Centre and Any other OU staff costs and travel and subsistence costs will be met by the home unit.

Membership will be for one meeting.

12.3.6 Online International Meeting TORs

ONLINE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE MEETING

Terms of reference
To seek and consider the views of international students on matters affecting their study at the Open University.

Membership
1. All international students are invited to register to participate

2. Thirty international student representatives identified by the QUSA Students Association, which may include up to four representatives who are not in themselves international students

3. At least two Associate Lecturer representatives ‘in attendance’, elected or co-opted from within ALs tutoring international students

4. Director, Access, Careers and Teaching Support (Chair)

5. Assistant Director, Student Services, the OU in the North ‘in attendance’

6. Three Student Support Team-based International Student Champions ‘in attendance’

7. All international students are invited to register to participate

8. Other staff ‘in attendance’, with appropriate expertise, co-opted for specific discussion items

Mode of operation

1. The Student Consultation Office will organise the online meeting.

2. The online meeting will run for a two weeks once a year and can include synchronous and asynchronous elements.

3. The meeting will be chaired by the Director, Access, Careers and Teaching Support.

4. Issues arising from the meeting that could usefully be discussed with a wider cross section of students would be followed up by further discussion in one or more of the online forums managed by the Student Consultation Office. The chair of the meeting and QUSA representatives will have a shared responsibility for ensuring that issues having wider implications are referred to the University Students Consultative Forum, via the Student Consultation Office.

5. The Student Consultation Office and the QUSA Students Association will jointly promote the opportunity for international students to participate in the meeting.

6. The agenda for the meeting will be agreed by a sub-group of the University Students Consultative Executive including representatives of the Student Consultation Office and the Students Association.

7. QUSA Students Association representatives, as well as individual international students and relevant parts of the University can will have the opportunity to propose issues to the agenda-setting group that they would like to be addressed in the meeting.

8. The Student Consultation Office will facilitate the agenda setting for the meeting, liaising with relevant parts of the University and QUSA, the Students Association to produce the content of the meeting and provide a briefing for the chair and moderators. A small agenda-setting group will collate ideas from the range of constituencies involved.

9. Members Volunteers will serve for one meeting although they may be invited to participate in follow up consultations.

10. The University Students Consultative Executive will have oversight of the operation of the meeting and issues raised through it, via the Student Consultation Office.

11. The Student Consultation Office will organise moderators for the meeting
10. The Student Consultation Office is responsible for publishing a draft summary of the meeting shortly after its conclusion for comment by students.

11. The Student Consultation Office is responsible for ensuring that a timely response is published to students letting them know how the consultation has been acted upon.

12.4 Appendix 4: TORs for Executive

THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS CONSULTATIVE EXECUTIVE

Terms of reference
1. This body is responsible for setting the agenda for the University Students Consultative Forum, ensuring that both University business requiring consultation with students and student-proposed topics are included.
2. It will also consider and agree action on issues coming out of the consultation process that have been referred to it by the Student Consultation Office in consultation with the OU Students Association, and will monitor the effectiveness of the student consultation process overall, proposing and overseeing implementation of changes as required.
3. The Student Consultation Office will produce an annual effectiveness review of student consultative processes on behalf of the University Students Consultative Executive.

Membership
1. OU Students Association President and one other Association Officer
2. Three students drawn from the membership of the University Students Consultative Forum, appointed by the OU Students Association for one year
3. Director, Students Academic Services (Chair)
4. A member of staff nominated by the Director, Students Academic Services and two members of staff nominated by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching Innovation)
5. The OU Students Association General Manager
6. A Nation Director to maintain a focus on Four Nation issues with respect to student consultation and reporting to national funding bodies
7. Head of the Office of the Director, Students University Secretary
8. A member of staff from External Engagement, nominated by the Director, External Engagement
9. Representation from the Faculties [To be decided]
10. A member of staff from IET, nominated by the Director, IET

Mode of Operation
1. The Executive will meet quarterly. Business will also be carried out by correspondence where necessary or by the appointment of sub-groups e.g. for agenda-setting.
2. The Student Consultation Office will work closely with the OU Students Association in setting the agenda for each meeting of the Executive.