OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
14 – 16 October 2016

DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The C E C is asked to:-

i) note the update

ii) comment on the proposal

iii) make nominations for the working group

1. Developing A Direct Student Approach: Background

1.1 Students voted for my Presidential Manifesto. I believe we should actualise its elements by firstly setting up a working group to create a Direct Student Approach via Digital Direct Democracy (TripleD). This paper includes the most relevant parts of the presidential manifesto and reference points around the association's current and future model. It also contains background research on potential technologies and a recommendation for proceeding.

1.2 "From the expanding universe to the opening university, we have an increasing connectivity that has yet to be utilised towards benefiting our students. We, as the students, have the opportunity to create a shared vision for the future of our Open University Student Association and turn it into a reality. We can achieve this in 3 enjoyable steps.

1.3 Firstly, equal power for all students! The future of OUSA has the option to move closer towards equality and inclusion for all. We can connect through an online inclusive platform and regional events, to directly create and participate in the changes we agree, are the most important. We will be able to voice our opinions and equally take part in decision-making. We can provide full transparency within an entertaining environment that gives the students the power to make change."

1.4 In order to meet the first step of Presidential Manifesto, understanding the Student Association's model is incredibly important. At its heart is 'Your Community', which is the entire student body’s attitudes, interests and similarities that unites us. Achieving high quality relationships with our students is the most important factor in creating a thriving community and I
believe we will continually improve our relationships and work towards a greater level of empathy and understanding with students.

1.5 By doing so, we become trusted representatives that can better represent the student voice, ‘Your Voice’. This representative model has its proven benefits, as shown by its level of adoption throughout government, business and our Association. However, this model has disadvantages and limitations, mainly its link to apathy, disempowerment and lower levels of engagement, which is the opposite of what we are trying to achieve.

1.6 This occurs because students are only empowered to vote for representatives once every two years at conference or online. This was previously limited to those fortunate to attend conference, but as a result of opening the process to one member one vote, we saw the highest amount of students’ votes ever. I believe stepping further towards inclusion will lead to similar results.

1.7 We as representatives cannot hold the embodied view of all students on all issues, so our students input their views on request into consultations on a small amount prescribed areas. This input is gathered and interpreted, then used as an element in decision making. In order to maximise inclusion, support equality and empower all students, I believe we should add a direct model to our Association. I would like to see students directly create ideas, priorities and develop them towards shaping our Association and University.

2. Progress

2.1 In order to achieve this, I discussed its possibility with key senior staff in the University. Overall the approach of digital direct democracy has resulted in interesting discussions and the potential of this is continuously growing.

3. Recommendation

3.1 Specifically I am exploring a potential pilot for the direct student approach with the University. I have engaged in discussions with the Student Engagement project lead about the direct model that has been implemented for OU staff in the form of ‘Open Ideas’. This pilot has proven a success with OU staff engagement and now has more than 9000 active users who suggest ideas to improve the University which are discussed, added to and ultimately voted up or down by their fellow colleagues. I would like to pilot a version to empower students and increase their involvement with the Association. Here’s a link to the company that may developed Open Ideas: [https://ideascale.com](https://ideascale.com).

3.2 This pilot could explore how a version of Open Ideas (Student Ideas?) might work for the Students Association by providing a place where students could share and develop ideas and vote them up or down. It would be the intention that if the idea reached a certain threshold number of votes, the Students Association would commit to discussing and exploring the idea at the Central Executive Committee. At first, the pilot would probably need to focus on a sizeable sample of students, but not yet the full student body. Lessons could be learned and evaluated to see if this model is the right one for the future when it could be expanded.
3.3 A successful implementation of a direct student approach could have a significant impact on the Nation Student Survey and our ranking, especially in the following sections and questions:

Learning opportunities [new section]

1. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth
2. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics
3. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt

Learning community [new section]

4. I feel part of a community of staff and students
5. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course

Student voice [new section]

6. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course
7. Staff value students’ views and opinions about the course
8. It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on
9. The Students’ Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests

3.4 I recommend we create a working group to discuss a direct student approach to assist me with the development and evaluation of a possible pilot. A meeting with the consultants is in the process of being arranged for November 2016, if the CEC is supportive of this proposal I would hope to get a small working group convened, with the aim of submitting a detailed paper around how the direct approach could be implemented and the potential changes that would be required. This paper should be submitted by the next CEC meeting, and potentially presented to the Board of Trustees for consideration around financial and staffing requirements thereafter

I welcome thoughts on this proposal.

Chris Pane
President