The CEC is asked to:-

i) **discuss** the points outlined below.

ii) Either:

   - **identify** a new project team from the newly elected CEC to discuss the outcomes of the Yammer ‘proof of concept’ trial and decide how to move forward.

   - **agree** to withdraw from the project if it is no longer needed.

1. **Background**

1.1 This project originally emerged from ongoing feedback given by the CEC on the limitations of the VLE student forums. A call for the University’s support in implementing new social media tools capable of supporting a vibrant student community was included in the President’s Annual Report to Council in November 2014.

1.2 In December 2014, the Association was invited to a consultation session to create a vision statement for the project, which was: “To provide a tool or suite of tools that can support the creation of an engaged community. It will be the central platform for students to interact with each other and make connections.”

1.3 Following this consultation, colleagues from Learning & Teaching Solutions (LTS) and IT helped the Association to define a project proposal, which was then presented to the University’s IT Change Board in July 2015 – the University’s internal process for project approval and resource allocation. The project proposal put forward Yammer as the recommended solution. However, this was dependent on the roll out of Office 365 to students (which to the present day has not yet happened).

1.4 A standalone ‘proof of concept’ system was created for the CEC to test in March 2016, which included a feedback group, designed to test the basic
features of Yammer and the user requirements outlined by the project team. Over the following two months around 16 members of the CEC tested the system but after some initial enthusiasm activity on Yammer stalled.

1.5 In July 2016, following a discussion with the outgoing President, Ruth Tutor, it was agreed that the Yammer proof of concept did not fulfil our requirements for a student community tool. In summary, the particular areas of concern were:

- The ability to create a profile relevant to the community (i.e. references to job titles, departments, ‘see what they’re working on’ etc. found throughout Yammer).

- Limited Student Association branding and lackluster mobile offering.

- The usability and accessibility of the system.

1.6 Furthermore, it was also felt that when the community tool project was envisaged 2 years ago it was as a replacement to the VLE forums. This in hindsight might have contributed to a set of requirements that mirrored existing functionality of the VLE forums, plus additional features to those available on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

1.7 As social media tools have continued to grow in popularity, and as it became apparent that the OU had no plans for the VLE forums to be decommissioned, it was felt the requirements and enthusiasm for a third community space might have changed.

2. Discussion Points

2.1 With the continued growth of social media platforms, is there still a need for a separate OU student community tool?

2.2 As there are no plans to decommission the VLE forums, has the scope of the project changed?

2.3 What are the CEC’s thoughts on maintaining and supporting three distinct community spaces? (in the 1. VLE forums; 2. Social media; 3. The student community tool).

David McCann
Head of Digital Communications