NEW STUDENTS SURVEY REPORT

The CEC is asked to:-

1) note the report.

1. Background

1.1 This report presents the 2016 findings from the annual New Student Survey, which is administered by the University’s Institute of Educational Technology. Feedback in response\(^1\) to the Students Association questions are analysed to identify ways in which we can better engage with students and raise awareness of the Association’s work.

2. Awareness of the Students Association

2.1 In response to the question, ‘Have you heard of the Open University Students Association?’ 72% of new students responded that they had heard of the Association (7% less than in 2015). This overall figure for awareness is calculated as the sum of the response options ‘Yes, but I’m not sure what it is’, ‘Yes, and I vaguely know what it is’ and ‘Yes, and I’m familiar with what it is’.

2.2 Understanding of the Students Association (the response option ‘Yes, and I am familiar with what it is’) was low at 16%. This was the lower than 2015, when 20% of students had chosen the same option. The following sections discuss awareness by different demographic variables, which can help towards identifying student groups where communication and engagement efforts could be better targeted.

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\(^1\) The 2016 New Student Survey returned feedback from 2281 students which was shared with the Students Association. All proportions are taken from this set of responses.
Communication Channels

2.3 The most popular communication channels in 2016 were ‘website’ (chosen by 41% of respondents) and ‘direct email’ (chosen by 28% of respondents). These figures were lower this year; in 2015, 55% of respondents had heard about the Students Association through the website and 45% had heard about it through direct email. Within regions, the highest proportion of students choosing ‘website’ were from Yorkshire and the highest proportion choosing ‘direct email’ were from the West Midlands.

2.4 Online forums and the OU Students Magazine also contributed to overall awareness, 11% had heard about the Association through online forums (16% in 2015) and 8% through the OU Students Magazine/newsletter (12% in 2015). In terms of social media, Facebook was chosen by 8% of the respondents (10% in 2015), online Freshers events by 6% of respondents (9% in 2015) and online induction events by 4% of respondents (8% in 2015). The lower figures for these platforms could also be due to the fact that students already aware of the Students Association are more likely to join in.

2.5 The figures for other communication channels were low, ranging from 0% to 3% for face-to-face study events, face-to-face social events, Twitter, Instagram, podcasts/radio, word of mouth and noticeboards at regional/national centres. These trends were similar across regions. As pointed out in the 2015 New Students Survey findings report, these figures can also be explained by the fact that many of the Students Association platforms are accessed in the first instance through emails and website news items.

2.6 Others had heard about the Students Association through looking for NUS discount cards, through "messages on the side bar of the StudentHome and course schedule page", and through a phone call to the OU helpline.
Awareness by Region

2.7 Awareness was highest for Scotland (80%) and lowest for East Midlands (63%) in 2016. Awareness had increased for the South (by 2%) and North West (by 4%) regions, but had declined for all other regions. This could be due to shifts in the student sample; however, awareness had declined by 10% or more for East Midlands, East of England, Scotland and the South East regions between 2015 and 2016.

2.8 In terms of familiarity with the Students Association, the West Midlands and the North were leading the other regions (23% and 20% of students were familiar with the Association, respectively). Familiarity was lowest for the South East region (7%).

Awareness by Age and Gender

2.9 The highest levels of awareness were noted for the age groups ‘56 and over’ at 83%, although this had declined by 10% from 2015. Overall awareness seemed to increase with age (Chart 3b). However, in terms of gender, awareness levels are similar across the categorisations of ‘male’ (73%) and ‘female’ (72%), and match the overall awareness figure of 72%.

Awareness by Subject Area

2.10 Awareness has increased by 2% for students studying Maths, Computing and Technology. It had declined for all other subject areas, most noticeably (by 10% or more) for CIC (Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum), FELS (Faculty of Education and Language Studies) and Science. The highest awareness levels were noted for those studying Arts, and students studying Arts and Social Sciences also showed the highest levels of understanding at 20% and 21%, respectively. Those in CIC had the lowest levels of awareness (57%).

3. Conclusion

3.1 These findings need to be seen in the context of the Students Association’s communication and engagement strategy, but also the wider implications of changes to the Association’s regional structure. The figures from 2016 can help towards targeting communications, and strengthening the Association’s presence at face-to-face consultative meetings and day schools. Students groups that need to be considered are:

- Students studying in the East Midlands, East of England, Scotland and the South East regions
- Students in the ‘under 25’ and ‘26-35’ age groups
- Those in the CIC, FELS and Science subject areas.

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Chart 3(b). Overall awareness appears to increase with age.
Chart 4. Awareness of the Students Association by subject area in 2016.