The CEC is asked to:

1. **Introduction**

   1.1 This paper proposes a new research project with two key objectives: 1. raising student involvement in a sustainable way by identifying barriers to becoming involved; 2. understanding what is needed to ensure long-term volunteer retention and how this needs to be incorporated into the way the Association presents itself to students.

2. **Research Proposal**

   2.1 This research proposal has grown from our strategic objectives of raising student awareness of, and involvement in, Students Association activities. This project was identified in the Students Association Strategy 2015-2018: ‘To develop and implement a research plan to understand the needs, concerns, priorities, ideas and interests of our students’ (p.10 of the Strategy document).

   2.2 This project also builds on the themes identified in previous research projects such as the ‘Get Engaged’ research conducted in 2014, which explored students’ interest in different aspects of the Association’s work including volunteering; (the report was presented at November 2014 CEC meeting). Two distinct studies are proposed for 2017-2018, with the research themes detailed below.
3. **Topic 1: Getting involved with the Students Association**

3.1 The Association has continued to develop its support and services for students, and this study will explore what students consider to be priority areas when engaging with the Students Association. It will also ask students to indicate their satisfaction with current opportunities/services/activities.

- To investigate what currently stops students from being involved, i.e. barriers to connecting more closely with the Association
- To identify student motivations for wishing to become involved and equally understanding why some students may not wish to be so involved
- Recommendations on how the understanding of these barriers can be incorporated into existing practices of how the Association presents itself to students to raise awareness and attract volunteers.

4. **Topic 2: ‘Understanding volunteering with the Students Association’**

4.1 The purpose of this topic is to gain understanding of volunteers’ involvement with different Association activities, the identification of requirements for supporting and training volunteers, aspects of motivation and barriers around volunteering, and the benefits of a recognition/reward system.

- To understand what students expect from their Association, depending on their level of involvement, e.g. guidance if they are a volunteer or simply updates on where to join student meet-ups if they are less involved
- To understand the role of the Association in students’ journey with the OU and beyond
- Recommendations on how this understanding can help with the recruitment of new volunteers and raising awareness of the Association.

5. **Impact**

5.1 This research will inform the strategic objectives of raising awareness of the Association’s work, identifying areas where student satisfaction could be
improved, and identifying new opportunities for engaging students in our work.

5.2 Furthermore the research will enable a progress evaluation by benchmarking against data collected by the ‘Get Engaged’ survey conducted in 2014; this would be on topics such as student satisfaction with the opportunities and support offered by the Association.

5.3 The findings will be also useful for different teams within the Association, as we build on the data we have collected regarding student community, communication channels, and volunteer training.

6. Next steps

6.1 Once approved, these projects will be scoped in more detail by VP Representation and Research and the Research and Information Officer, in collaboration with Head of Student Voice, Head of Student Volunteering, and Head of Student Community. Following evaluation, the relevant Officer/Staff team are to take ownership of findings in areas such as community/student voice/volunteering/student support. This is to ensure that the findings are fed back within the Association for further action.

6.2 Applications will go through the Student Research Project Panel. The Association currently has a number of feedback channels to choose from, such as running focus groups and/or workshops, using the Student Research Forum, and launching surveys; the projects will also be informed by desk research on good practice within the sector.

Caroline Poppenga, VP Representation and Research
Pooja Sinha, Research and Information Officer