The CEC is asked to:-

i) **Consider** the findings of the Working Group

ii) **Discuss** recommendations

iii) **Approve** the recommendations

1. Executive Summary

1.1. The Grassroots Working Group ask the CEC to discuss and approve:

- A new Student Community volunteer position – ‘Association Ambassadors’ (name subject to change)
- ‘Meet and Greets’ (name subject to change) – gatherings across the UK and Ireland where students have the opportunity to meet and talk with members of the CEC and other students
- Review of External Engagement opportunities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the introduction of a role to assist with external engagement in the Nations.

2. Background

2.1. A review of the structure and organisation of Students Association activities took place in late 2015. This included key stakeholder interviews, a survey of active members of Assemblies, a student consultation, a CEC workshop and a focus group exercise drawing on the experience of past and present involved members. The review identified that local elections discouraged participation more than encouraged it; and Regional Assemblies were not consistently achieving their objectives of creating a vibrant Student Community.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
2.2. A survey to the Regional Assembly Executives in early 2015 revealed that the Executives themselves saw their two most important objectives to be ‘to represent the interests of the student community’ and ‘to create a vibrant student community’ but that only 20% and 16%, respectively, of respondents strongly agreed that they achieved these objectives.

2.3. Comments from the Executives themselves drew upon some of the bleak failings of the Assemblies, disclosing that in some cases Execs had been elected into the positions and left to their own devices with no directions or guidelines with what to do next. Most respondents noted that student participation was incredibly low and attributed this to a lack of awareness of the OU Students Association generally. Another suggestion was that the Assemblies themselves stood as a barrier between the representatives and the students. Others simply stated that they struggled to see the point in the Assemblies and one simply wrote “get rid of it” when asked for ways to improve.

2.4. In late 2015 independent consultants, ‘SUMS Consulting’, were asked to “review the regional assembly structure in England to determine if it is fit for purpose and to make recommendations for improvement or propose an alternative model”. Their conclusion was that the “current structure does not meet its constitutional purpose, nor does it motivate sufficient interest in the wider student body to ensure it is replete”.

2.5. The unpopular election process was largely the focus for concern – the report highlighted that only 10% of the students that were registered to vote in the elections actually did and only 36 Executive places were filled out of 100. It was again noted here that some of the Assembly Execs themselves believed the effectiveness of the executive structures was directly related to the number of students engaged with the election process:

“Students do not like going through the bureaucracy of the elections.”

2.6. In its conclusion, the final report asserted that the English regional structure was unfit for purpose and continually failing to attract sufficient participation from the student body to warrant its continuation.

2.7. Although the report was based on activity in England, agreement was reached that all home nations would be included in the new structure. During the review the possibility of a new National Executive as a replacement for Regional Assemblies was explored however this was rejected at the October 2016 Central Executive Committee and led to the creation of the Grassroots Working Group.

3. The Grassroots Project Aims and Membership

3.1. The Grassroots Working Group’s aim is “to consider what structure should be in place for the OU Students Association at grassroots level for each of the Nations, Republic of Ireland and Continental Europe.” They were brought together to discover a functional structure that adequately supports the needs of the OU Students. Their goal is to create a working structure at grassroots level. Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
that enhances and benefits the Student Community.

3.2. Membership of the Grassroots Working Group was open to all CEC members and the group consists of:

Working Group Leads: Deputy President, Vice President Community

Working Group Members:
Vice President Administration
Vice President Education
Vice President Representation and Research
Area Association Representatives England
Area Association Representative Northern Ireland.
Area Association Representative Scotland
Area Association Representative Wales
Area Association Representative Europe
Faculty Association Representative (STEM)

Main supporting staff members: Wendy Burrell, Pooja Sinha, Kate Dungate, Beth Metcalf and Verity Robinson.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
4. Evidence Gathered as Part of the Grassroots Project

4.1. The Working Group wanted to consult with as many students as possible to try and receive the opinion of large numbers of students. As a result the Group put together a number of communications to draw in and encourage the student voice. The highlights of these are listed below in more detail.

4.2. Student Survey
Permission was granted from the Learning and Teaching Institute to send out a student survey to all members of the Students Association via Camel. The survey asked students about their opinions of the student community and how to improve, along with other questions relating to their awareness of the Association generally and a small number of demographic questions (faculty/age/country) to help with analysis. The survey closed on the 6th March with 3154 responses. Full survey analysis can be found attached as ‘Attachment 1’ and ‘Attachment 2’.

4.3. Freshers Week Facebook Chat
VP Community hosted a Facebook chat titled ‘Meet OU Students in Your Area’ on the 25th January which was really-well attended by new students. Most were curious as to know what events were already planned in their local areas and how to find other students in their area or on their course. Representatives were on hand to signpost them to the right direction and many of those representatives took the opportunity to introduce themselves to the student body. Overall it felt very relaxed and there was a really nice atmosphere and sense of community.

4.4. Assembly Executive Facebook Group Discussion
The Working Group discussed the importance of consulting with past and present elected Assembly Executives and Members to gather their ideas and opinions on the Grassroots Project and ask them to share their invaluable experiences of connecting with students at that level. VP Community set up a Facebook group and asked the members a series of questions around the previous structures, where the gaps were and what structure they thought would work at grassroots level. Full questions and responses are attached as ‘Annex 1’ (page 9 of this document).

4.5. Grassroots Facebook Chat
Deputy President and VP Community hosted a Facebook Chat inviting students to share their ideas for improving the Student Community. This was a very constructive discussion and a great opportunity for some of the survey respondents to elaborate on their answers and with many of the Working Group in attendance discussion was free-flowing. Topics discussed included what a possible new Community volunteer would do as part of their role and what Community means to them as OU Students. Full responses to questions can be found in ‘Annex 2’ (page14 of this document) but commonly discussed issues again were the general lack of awareness and engagement.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
5. **Working Group Findings and Recommendations**

5.1. Having considered and discussed the information available, it was clear that students wanted to socialise more with each other and be involved with the Association but that they didn’t necessarily know how. A huge problem evident from the survey responses was that awareness of the Association was very low and awareness of the Regional Assemblies was even lower. It was suggested that the political element brought in by the Assemblies did not cater for the students who are only interested in the social aspect of university life. The Working Group therefore decided it was best to separate the social from the political and create two new volunteer roles: a new community volunteer to encourage the social aspect and another volunteer to concentrate on the more ‘political’ external engagement issues in the Nations (please see paragraphs 6 and 8).

5.2. As we have already mentioned, arguably the biggest issue the OU Students Association faces is a distinct lack of awareness. Many students told us that they were only drawn to the Association’s existence a number of years into their degree and in some cases not until the end of their time studying with the OU. It is very important that OU Students Association makes their presence known as early as possible in our students study journey and the new website and future Student Community projects catered around Freshers should make a big difference in tackling this problem.

5.3. **Recommendations:**

- A new Student Community volunteer position – ‘Association Ambassadors’ (name subject to change)
- ‘Meet and Greets’ (name subject to change) – gatherings across the UK and Ireland where students have the opportunity to meet and talk with members of the CEC and other students
- Review of External Engagement opportunities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the introduction of a role to assist with external engagement in the Nations.

6. **‘Association Ambassadors’**

6.1. The Grassroots Project Working group explored a new volunteer position that would help spread the word about the Association, signpost other students to us and at the same time help create a vibrant student community. The proposed role description for the Ambassadors can be found attached as ‘Annex 3’ (page 20 of this document). The title of Association Ambassadors is still a working title and other suggestions including “Student Community Volunteer” have been put forward. We will continue to call them ‘Association Ambassadors’ in this paper for reading ease.

6.2. As students are interested in volunteering in different (online and/or face to face) ways and with different time commitments the Grassroots project Working Group

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
recognised the need for flexibility in the new role so that students with little spare time to offer would still be able to volunteer and make a difference.

6.3. Level one allows the volunteer to take on mainly online duties as opposed to level two volunteers who are asked to take on additional face to face tasks as well as having the online presence asked at level one.

6.4. Part of the role is to promote and/or attend local events in the volunteers own communities to help create a sense of local student community and improve engagement with the student body. It is hoped that this approach to community will be more inviting and social than the previous Assembly set up was.

6.5. The volunteers will be supported by their respective Area Association Representative(s), VP Student Community and the Community and Volunteering Teams within the OU Students Association Office. There will be no cap on the number of volunteers appointed who work alongside Area Association Reps, VP Student Community and other members of the Central Executive Committee in improving the OU Student Community for everyone.

6.6. The Working Group recommends recruiting Ambassadors as soon as reasonably practicable.

7. ‘Meet and Greets’

7.1. The Grassroots Working Group discussed the popularity of the OU student consultations - It is clear that the students want to engage with the OU and talk about their experiences.

7.2. The Grassroots Working Group discussed the benefit of having CEC led events across the UK and Ireland that would encourage students to come along and meet their representatives. These would be marketed as an opportunity for students to talk to their representatives, meet other students and discuss their experiences in a relaxed environment without having their discussions limited to a select few topics. Please be aware that similar to the ‘Ambassadors’ volunteer role above, the title for these events is still under discussion but will continue to be referred to as ‘meet and greets’ for the remainder of this paper.

7.3. These will also be a way in which the CEC can discuss their work with the students so to increase the awareness of the CEC’s roles and how they benefit the student body and reduce the distance between students and their representatives.

7.4. The Working Group discussed holding 3 events per year in Wales, Ireland and Scotland as well as up to 6 in England and a further 4 online at the beginning of each CEC month. The locations have been chosen after consulting a student ‘heat map’ (Attachment 3) in order to try and encourage maximum student participation.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
7.5. It is envisaged that up to 3 members of the CEC will host each Meet and Greet much the same way it is done for the OU Student Consultations. Association Ambassadors local to the event could also attend and support the facilitation.

7.6. A draft schedule can be found attached as ‘Annex 4’ (page 23 of this document) but this is subject to change once organising starts.


8. External Engagement in Scotland, Ireland and Wales

8.1. In England, external engagement is within the remit of the President who addresses issues along with the General Manager of the Students Association. However, in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland this is currently the responsibility of the AAR. This highlights a huge inconsistency between the AAR’s in England and in the rest of the UK.

8.2. Area Association Representatives (AARs) and other volunteers in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland continue to represent OU Students to devolved Governments and other external agencies. This is an important aspect of Students Association activity however there is scope for improvement.

8.3. AARs in the Nations have stressed that more support and assistance is needed in order to make the necessary impact in their area and be the first institution called upon when a part time student voice is needed.

8.4. AARs have noted a preference of government and external bodies to engage with local student representatives. The Association would also benefit from improving relationships between the OU Students Association and the regional offices, particularly in terms of sharing information regarding external affairs.

8.5. The Working Group have identified that there is no (or limited) access to previous Students Association responses on Government Consultations which would be of great benefit to ensure effective campaigning. The Grassroots Project recommends that previous Student Association responses to Government Consultations should be shared to the CEC forums to enable current representatives to gain a fuller understanding of previous policy. Future responses to Government Consultations should be shared on the Association website in the interest of transparency and in order to increase awareness of Students Association activities among our members.

8.6. The Working Group also discussed the benefits of a more effective mechanism for gathering the student voice and sharing responses on political and higher educational matters.

8.7. The Association should also consult with members of relevant Open University Staff from each of the Nations to develop our understanding of engagement opportunities and how we might strengthen our partnership.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
8.8. The Grassroots Working Group discussed the benefits of employing a full time member of staff in the Students Association office to support the AARs external affairs duties in the Nations as well as discussing the benefits of another Officer. Subvention negotiations are currently underway and a full remit review of the CEC is expected to take place later this year. The Grassroots Working Group recommends delaying significant changes on external engagement until we know the outcome of these activities and the adoption of an interim model (as outlined below) to ensure that work continues on political and external engagement in the immediate term.

8.9. It is imperative that each Nation has a supported team to work with their respective AAR to deal with devolved Governmental matters and address Higher Educational issues. As an interim measure we recommend that the AAR for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland work with a small group of volunteers (number to be agreed) to help with external engagement tasks until further review takes place. This group of volunteers can support the elected representative for the area as a consultative group, contributing to written responses and delegating for the elected representative where appropriate. Students will be asked to apply to be part of this team and will be appointed by a committee. It is envisaged that the appointment committee will consist of the respective AAR, an Association staff member, one other member of the CEC and a selected student from that Nation. For the current version of the role description, please see ‘Annex 5’ (page 25 of this document).

8.10. It should be noted that there was some debate between appointing and electing these volunteers in the Nations. For now, the consensus is that these should be appointed by a panel/committee. That is not to say that this could not change in the future once engagement and awareness improves.

Verity Robinson, on behalf of the Grassroots Working Group
Grassroots Project Lead

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
Annex 1
Grassroots Exec's FB Discussion

1. Local level representation past and present.
   a. What is done now at a local level and what do you think is missing?
   b. What do you feel hasn’t worked previously, needs improving or should not be included at a local level?

   - Engagement with the student body at large within its various societies and study and social groups is currently a "hit and miss" affair. There are quite simply not enough people available to do the job of encouraging more students to be a part of a genuine OU community, as opposed to an OU Students Association community. A student can be a member of the OU community without necessarily feeling part of the Student Association community.
   - Should include alumni
   - Cannot ‘create community’ they have to evolve – could develop from a sense of ‘identity’
   - NI is missing engagement with local parliament but are working on this as well as linking with other local SU’s. Missing link between the Association and the volunteers in terms of what they may be saying to Westminster and what’s being said in other nations.
   - General involvement in NI is low
   - No need to have another 'representative' role to pass on concerns or signpost to support
   - Structure important so that people know what to do, who their contact is and what capacity that volunteer has.
   - Clear job description, support and direction
   - Communication is key
   - Community level volunteering may help isolated student relate to their student community
   - Create awareness of the new volunteer role with clear purpose of their role
   - Formal structure at local level (Europe) is stuffy and daunting, less bureaucratic role more popular.
   - OUSA represents students and their interests in two quite distinct ways: (1) participation in formal committees and associated activities, and (2) less formal 'local' interaction with students. It is absolutely essential that OUSA's role at local level is clearly defined, first. Then, and only then, can the necessary supporting infrastructure be decided upon.
   - Areas where there are parliamentary meetings may benefit from elections to find the best person for important tasks.
   - Solutions need not be the same for each area
   - Scotland have a good team of volunteers (although small in number)
   - Local level support must comprise of elected and non-elected' volunteers because election demands responsibility and generates commitment.
   - Contact is missing, too few opportunities to meet together.
   - Should have Association presence at day schools
   - Build contacts and increase awareness
   - Meet-ups are hit and miss because we don’t know where students live
   - Elections put students off

2. Students needs

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
a. What do students need at a grassroots level to develop a sense of community?

b. How can local volunteers help OU students on their study journeys?
   - Online and in person events
   - No ‘central coffee shop’ like normal universities, need to create something like that if we can
   - Having meet ups in OU buildings help as it’s ‘home’
   - Have a presence at open days with both current and past students
   - Communities within faculties also needed for study support
     o Faculty aligned societies (but very labour intensive with no regular staff support and depend on a very small number of volunteers
     o Allow more networking between students at different stages
     o Encourage faculty based events on campus and regionally
     o Facilitate academic ‘student buddy’ system
     o Perhaps more centralised faculty based activities
   - Should have faculty based groups with same status as regional based ones
     o Groups for each faculty (or maybe school level) on FB with parallel VLE forums
     o Also group for open degree would be usefull
   - Noticed a change in social participation over the years in Psychology, less now than before.
     o Tutorial sizes are larger and broken into cluster groups
   - Arts faculty organised a series of events in Glasgow that were well attended last year, but not repeated (potentially due to funding issues)
   - Information and signposting for when they’re having issues
   - Unsure whether this role should be there to support students studies
   - Other students sharing ideas and experiences are inspiring and motivating
   - Regional groups are dormant
   - We should do more at Freshers to welcome students from day one
   - Point of contact for new students essential in order to get them involved, maybe inviting the student to ‘register’

3. The Role/s
   a. What should or should not be included in the role/s requirements and why?
   b. What intensity or expectations should be expected of this role/s? (e.g. light-touch, formal etc)
    - Requirement in nations for role that interacts with local parliaments
      o Varies in intensity
    - Need to be transparent as to meetings in MK and expectancy to attend
    - In England could be a light role with expectations to report to AAR
    - Europe – light role of chosen responsibilities and reporting back. Regular virtual meet-ups with AAR and volunteers
    - Remit would be ‘social/supportive mechanism’ in conjunction with LERs
    - Volunteers should get involved with open days more to raise awareness right from the start
   c. What roles do people feel are important locally?
    - Attending OU events e.g skills workshops
    - Attending degree ceremonies
    - Attending external events linked to higher education

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
- Organising meet ups
- Organising open day/conference events
- Attending events with funding councils/government departments
- Be a friendly face locally for the Association, be there for students if needed
- Signposting students to support/groups, particularly for new students
- Need more people talking to students in all nations, day schools/resi schools/graduation/meet ups/passing any related info back to AAR’s
- Sensible and practical mix of elected and appointed reps
  - If people are appointed, it’s essential that those making the appointments are subject to election
- Split and create two roles, one more intensive, directly supported by the AAR’s and a lighter version of the same that give time where they can supported by both AAR’s and the more intensive role
  - These would help by providing guidance and help to promote any events or social within the area

4. Recruiting volunteers
   a. How should students be recruited for local level volunteering (e.g. elected, appointments panel etc.) and what are the pros and cons?
   b. Should there be a cap on numbers of volunteers; and why or why not?
      - Should not be a cap on numbers, want to see more volunteers get involved
      - As there are limited numbers of volunteers coming forward we should not put up additional barriers
        - E.g, having a selection process for small roles, however, selection might be required for volunteer roles that formally represent the Association
      - No caps, except perhaps at degree ceremonies
        - Although, should have students to call at last minute in case of drop outs
        - Perhaps share volunteers across neighbouring areas if possible
      - Some need to be elected to give their role credibility e.g when attending parliamentary committee
      - Should be elected for ‘executive’ level and appointed by local appointments committee for the lesser roles. Would need to be local so they understand the areas
      - We are trying to attract more volunteers, if we limit numbers this might defeat the purpose
      - For light touch – appointed through straightforward non-stringent approach
        - Although recognise the difference in nations
        - However, appointments might be more reliable in finding the right candidate, electorates can make strange choices
      - No cap but shouldn’t tell volunteers as they feel more ‘special’ if they don’t know numbers are unlimited
      - Elections can be intimidating, but sometimes application forms can be off putting
      - If role descriptions are created for particular roles students can just apply, elections not needed. They are then defined by the role and the students/staff and other members know what they’re volunteering for
      - If you can have 2 roles you could have a higher number of volunteers for the lighter role as well as the senior role

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- Appointment panel might be necessary for areas with a higher number of applicants. If the number of volunteers is low then their application can just be checked for suitability and approved.
- Up to 6 elected ‘executives’, elections to be at the same time as the other elections, the other volunteers to be appointed by local appointments panel with no cap on numbers.

5. Volunteering
   a. What support should be in place for the student who is volunteering at a local level?
   b. What type of training would be important for volunteering?
   - Support will depend on the role
   - More support required to begin with until volunteer understands what is expected of them
   - Training needed but tailored to the nation/regional requirements
     o Training might not be necessary in England aside from the training already in place (graduation etc)
     o Face to face training not always possible, although useful. Online training might be more appropriate for OU students who most likely work and have little other spare time
   - Support should come from another student, not the office.
     o No more formal structure
     o Someone they can ask questions of
   - The volunteer will need:
     o Knowledge – where to find further info
     o Overview of the association, what we do and don’t do
   - Volunteer should be comfortable talking to other students
   - Person to contact and access to info and online training
   - Maybe a volunteer pack could be created with useful links, contacts and online material
   - Need to be careful with support, although we don’t want to abandon volunteers, neither do we want to patronise them
   - AAR’s could be on hand to give guidance when needed as well as VP Community, hopefully new volunteers would find support in fellow reps too through networking with each other
   - Volunteer pack could include handbook with association structure/contacts and summary of posts/services to signpost to students, summary of other volunteer roles
   - Perhaps a welcome meeting rather than formal training and regular virtual meetings between AAR’s and volunteers
   - Need to ensure volunteers are given as much factual info as possible so that they are relaying accurate info to students
     o Do’s and don’t so students know that there are some issues that they shouldn’t deal with themselves

6. Working with other volunteers
   a. How could local volunteers support and work with the AARs/VP community?
   b. b. How can the association support the work of local volunteers?

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
- AAR’s could be the point of contact for the local volunteers along with an office contact
- Can help by giving their time and encouraging others to do the same
- Structure important, and regular contact between AAR’s and the volunteers, Association to support by providing information
- Local volunteers should link and work alongside the AAR’s to promote any activity, keep AAR’s in touch with what’s happening at the local level and AAR’s should update volunteers with OU Association events
- Allow the students to volunteer with flexibility, that the Association is open to suggestions of what they want to be involved in
- AAR’s can ask volunteers to attend meetings on their behalf if they are unable to attend
- Association need to be accessible and understanding, the support on hand for the volunteers needs to not be confusing
- AAR’s should have a presence online
- Not sure there are enough AAR’s in England to cover the Geographical basis

7. Structure
   a. What structure would work at a grass root level?
   - Combination of elected and appointed student reps with easy, quick and direct access to OUSA
   - Resources relevant to local interests and activities
   - England – no elected reps, turnout too low
   - ‘Light touch’ volunteers in regular contact with AAR’s and each other
   - Combination of roles, none elected, appointed by panel
     o Volunteers interested in policy/political
     o Light touch role
   - Might be complications with appointments into political roles
   - Need elected positions still, as well as local communications volunteer and finance volunteer. Local light touch role can be appointed
   - Need to give opportunities for students to dip in and out as it’s important to have students at a local level
   - Elections are a no-go, application and appointed by committee
   - Should encourage lots of volunteers to get involved then from that base later on perhaps reintroduce elections

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Annex 2

Grassroots FB Chat – 16/02/2017

1. What does community mean to you as an OU student?
   - I think it is feeling part of something, knowing that you share something in common with others and having someone to talk to about that shared experience.
   - Through meet-ups and association activities I feel much less alone in my studies. Even where loved ones are supportive they can't understand entirely what it's like in a way that someone who is also an OU student can.
   - A group united in a common goal, that the group abides by certain rules, mutual understanding for what it stands for and ensures it works toward promoting and benefiting those members connected together.
   - That's one of the advantages of the official groups-or having strong moderators on unofficial forums. For example, I have recently joined a group who are, in my opinion, sailing a bit too close to the wind asking about iCMA and TMA questions. If we could encourage these groups back into the heart of the OUSA, that would be great.
   - Belonging to a group with similar interests.
   - Being a part of a community with the same end goal but who aren't just local, from all over the UK, the world even.
   - Being able to go on line at 5am panicking about a TMA and know that there will be people in the same boat. Others at work don't always understand when I have to say no to things as I'm studying so it's nice to have people who understand.
   - From a student who is unable to get online - All working together to make sure that we are all supported and to ensure that we all have a happy time while studying with the OU.
   - Being included. I tell you, for someone like myself, it means a lot that I don't have to justify where I'm from and that sort of nonsense. I'm a student just like everyone else and that means a lot. Plus, people are truly awesome. We all are one no matter our backgrounds, creeds, physical or mental difficulties, health, sexual orientation etc. I love our diversity ;) I feel I belong.
   - I have found that my b124 TG is full of people that don't participate in TG discussions unless it's counted towards their TMA mark. My tutor doesn't even make the effort and takes 3/4 days to respond to emails! Which when its regarding a TMA is not helpful! I think that's why I'm now 6wks behind on my study!! I think we need more of a community spirit and support network for students within these types of TGs
     - I have heard similar comments from across the university. How do you think the OU could address these issues?
     - I think promoting fb pages like this and the module pages with the university tutorial student cafes. I didn't know there was a b124 fb page and group chat until I joined this group and a fellow students from a different region and TG informed me
     - Do you think students would be as likely to use those type of groups if the OU had more involvement in them or would that out people off?
     - I think if the OU promoted it within the introductory forum and within the initial individual TG welcome forum for the modules it would encourage more people you participate and understand others are going through the same things

2. Our survey responses so far indicate that 51.68% of respondents do NOT feel part of the Student Community.
   a. What are your reactions?
   b. How do you think we can improve that number?

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I didn't know about the Student association until the student conference applications opened but that was only because a friend pointed it out; I was finishing my 2nd year by that point. I feel the online presence has grown since I first joined and is more accessible now. The conference was great to meet other students. More events on campus would be good as it does make you feel like there are others in the same boat as you.

Send more SA info to new and continuing students. Publicise meet ups more and advertise better the need for new meet up organisers.

I agree. Trying to publicise meet ups can be hard. Would be handy if there was a central spot to advertise rather than having to spam the FB groups all the time with the same info.

I am not surprised students may not feel part of the student community, distance learning can be very isolating. That is why it is important to find new ways to help OU students engage with other students, especially if it is something they feel they are missing.

It's going to sound a bit odd but it was the distance learning and solitary aspect that appealed to me at first. It was only when I started ‘meeting’ people through the forums that I began to realise how much being in contact with other students helped my study.

3. What would enable you to engage more with the OU student community?

Visibility.

Knowing how to access information, and having it all in one place is important to me.

Having reps more visible, make it easy for people to find who they want for things.

Be more open.

People at my meet ups have said how difficult it is to find info on meet ups and other association events. I think it needs to be more entwined with regular OU info.

Studenthome or the dashboard should have a link to the association.

4. How can we provide a community feeling and connection as distance learning students?

Social media. A more engaging VLE. One stop for all info type thing would really make a difference.

I agree. One place where all information can be found, that means all the face-to-face meet ups, Facebook chats, virtual events etc.

It definitely needs to be easier to find all of the information so a one-stop shop sounds great. At the moment I think it's too hard to find information.

I use various forms of social media which are really useful tools, but there are some students that don't use it and the VLE is their own avenue of communication with other students. I agree in trying to promote the use of VLE and increase activity maybe this would used more if it was improved. I think tools such as Skype have been useful in our committee meetings especial if students have a particular disability, struggle to type or follow chat or social media.

Creating groups that unite students with a common theme, listening to the student's needs and if there is a gap then try to provide that.

More interaction with student home page. I know the OU website is improving. It would be nice to have better links on that or a tab to highlight student association events. We are in student home on a regular basis it would be a good place to grab everyone's attention.

Annex's to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
- You are right there. I only found the Association forums because there was a
direct link to them from my module homepage. Without that who knows?

- I agree with the above. Streamlined hub of info, online but via deferent platforms,
a bit like OUSA have been actively doing the past year cause I find I know more
than I did before

- I think we need to try to form community groups as well as one big group. I see
there are meet ups up north but I think we need to see if people in all regions
want to meet up and chat about the good bad and ugly of distance learning.

- Certain events are advertised on the student home but they are easily missed,
so I'm not sure that the students notice the information. Lots of information is sent
via emails with information from the association, they provide regular newsletters too
  - The mags are good. Even the odd reminder about the existence of the
  OUSA webpage would be useful, I think.
  - Good place to advertise information especially all the association has to
  offer from support from the Disabled Students Group, societies to student
  stories which are great way to get things out there.

- Information would be better in one place, perhaps with a static link on the OU
homepage? Once you follow the link you can see further links to forums,
Facebook posts, groups etc. I have noticed that the OUSA forums on the OU
website aren't utilised as much as they could be. That is one of my 'go to' places.
  - Forums are a great idea. Posting regular questions that spark a good
debate would be a great idea. Get people talking. Doesn't even need to
be political

- If attending a student meet up I alway take additional information with me, from
useful website links, information leaflets from the Disabled Students Group and
the OU Student Association. I think by using meet ups / Coffee mornings is a
good way of reaching students and sharing information too. I also do the same if
attending a tutorial as two disabled students in my module hadn't heard of the
Association or DSG so good way of reaching those students.
  - omg I hadn't thought about that. I'm gonna take my organiser bag with me
next tutorial and share before tutor gets in the room

5. If you could visualise a community volunteer role, what would it involve and
how would it help the OU student community?
- I’d visualise a buddy /peer type system where we have get togethers to socialise but
students know there are peers who could give advice. If that makes sense? Not like
online but more physical presence .
- A fellow OU student had the Idea to have a pre student coffee catch up for those
thinking of joining the OU but wanted more information about being a student. If
people learn about the student association from the start I definitely think it would
improve student experience and promote the student communities.
  - wow catching people early, as they are thinking or registering, thats a great idea
  - I think it’s a great idea. When you think about a brick uni you go and chat with
students there. Why not the same with OU??
  - That’s a very good idea. I know the Disabled Students Group (DSG) were trying
to do the same. It would also be good support for students who encounter
difficulties during the registering process, or for encouraging those who may want
to study but feel barriers in the way. In a much less formal way too.

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documents.
- I took me 3 years to apply for my degree in the end as I was so apprehensive about signing up. Would have made me feel better to talk to someone going through it already.
  o Exactly the situation where a bit of support would have been very useful. Do you wish you had someone that could have reassured you to start earlier? I would like to get more involved in the OUSA and I would be happy to be in a buddy/support system, but don't necessarily want to become a rep. So if we could build up more of a community, that would be great.
  o I think I would have started sooner had someone explained how it all works, tutorials, online groups, TMAs etc. I recently helped someone who was starting (she was a friend of a friend who was put in contact with me) and she said it helped to chat.
- Having information about other services would be good to have actually.
- Think that's a great idea too. A lot more proactive really
- As Association reps we talk about these sorts of issues with the university and I will make sure to pass this feedback on. Do you think this is an activity the student association should be involved in or should the OU led the way on having students at Open days etc?
  o Think both
- I used to work as a student ambassador for a brick uni (when I attempted a brick uni). I found that prospective students respond better to actual students as they tell the truth. I would be happy to be involved as an ambassador if that's the way you want to go.
- I would be happy to participate in such a role. I'm pretty good and convincing people to sign up to the OU. Now if they would pay me a commission......

6. We've been working on a new possible volunteer role that would see a new group of volunteers out there promoting and signposting the students to the Students Association. The idea is that we would grow awareness and create a larger community at the same time. We'd love to hear what you think.
  - I think that's a great idea. I can see a lot of us definitely interested in helping out.
  - I'd be happy to help where I can
  - Would be really great to hear everyone’s ideas on what this role should involve? If you created a role description, what would you say are the key elements of it?
    - Student Ambassador???
    - Key elements: the willingness to promote the OU and OUSA at every opportunity but these opportunities could be created also locally and facilitated by OU staff where applicable. Say if they think there could be interest in a local event in a college, sixth form etc then we could go along and have a stall. Similarly, when exams take place or tutorials locally we could also be there to greet folk coming in and distribute materials or talk to them
    - We were student ambassadors at UWE and that seemed to relate to students more than a volunteer title.
    - I think going to colleges as a voice for distance learning would be a great idea. It gets the idea out there that you don't have to go to a brick uni. That would definitely appeal to a lot of people if they were aware of it.

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
• It's really interesting to hear your ideas about helping new students to understand more about the University and what it is like to be an OU student. In what ways could we reach more students and build the OU community for those who have already registered as students?
  - An interesting question as with Brick uni you have an open day. Could you do a mixture of virtual and face to face meet ups?
  - You tube videos?? I remember you doing an introduction video before student conference. Show people what student life is like.
  - That is certainly what we try to do at the minute, encouraging students to have meet ups, inviting students to campus when we have the opportunity (for workshops, student conference etc) and having an online equivalent when possible.
  - I know there's been a lot of faculty meet ups but unfortunately all during the week. Not great if you are working full time.
  - When the university organise things they quite often do that during office hours, which unfortunately doesn't suit many OU students.
  - If we were a normal uni when we are all on campus or available during the day - but distance learning you would think it would be a bit more flexible. I might be being a bit demanding about the hours but it would be nice to have the opportunity to meet with the faculty.

• Open Student Community Adviser - An OSCA
• Could we not plug OUSA on module forums? Because I don't think I ever saw anything about it there. Also, could we not plug links to 'chat room' or forum within module forums? Because the whole having to find the OUSA forums if you know about it, cause half the times you don't know it exists, is a performance. Think OU need to make OUSA intrinsic and woven into the fabric of all faculties. Just saying!!! I plugged my coffee chat on my dd205 cafe forum and moderator said it was OK but how about we make this routine?
• I've just been doing this to plug my meet up so I'm asking if they know about the OUSA on the Facebook groups as well
  - I am going to find out how many on the group knew this debate was on tonight

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
- These are the results so far about the poll I've done on the 3 Facebook groups for my module. But most of the students saw the poll but did not take part - part of the problem with community is engagement.

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Annex 3

Association Ambassadors

Overview of role…
We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers across the world to help us promote the Students Association and engage with our student community at a grassroots level. OU Students are automatically members of the OU Students Association. As an Association Ambassador you would help promote the Association and share our activities through your student networks. Whether you are totally new to the Association or have previous experience volunteering with us, you can help our community to grow. You won’t be expected to know about everything we do.
If you would like to help students connect with each other and to build awareness of the Student Association, this role is for you!

Essential for role:
Students who are interested in becoming more involved in the OU Student Community and enjoy talking to other students (online or face to face) are perfect for this role.

Supported by:
You will be supported in your role from our team of elected student representatives and our Volunteering team. Contact details can be found in your volunteer handbook.

Main responsibilities:
We would like our volunteers to have the flexibility to pick how heavily involved they would like to be in this role. If you would like to volunteer but are not able to offer much time or commitment, level 1 could be perfect for you. If you would like to get involved with some of the more hands on volunteering, you can join as a level 2 Ambassador. You can also change from one to the other at any time.

Level 1
• Chatting online about the Students Association and signposting students to our services
• Attend online events
• Promoting Association events and support services in conversation to students (avoiding spam in groups/pages/forums)
• Keeping in touch with students in your area and promoting local events
• Contribute stories or information to the volunteer newsletter

Level 2
As above, you will engage with student online to promote what the Association can do for students. At level 2 it would also be great for you to be involved in the following:

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
Where possible, attend local ‘Meet and Greets’, local meet-ups and local OU Consultations to signpost and encourage student engagement with the Students Association.

Consider running a stall or be present at events or presentations run by the Association (most likely on campus in Milton Keynes).

Encourage attendance at local events by arranging trips etc… For example a trip to a free museum or local exhibit.

Lead projects in the community with the support of the Volunteer Team.

Desired skills:
- Good communication skills
- Passion for the OU Students Association mission statement and objectives
- A willingness to engage with new students
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team

What the OU Students Association expect from you in this role:
- To act professionally whilst in your role
- To ensure that you act in a way which reflects our commitment to Equality and Diversity (our expectations of volunteers can be found in your handbook)
- To try and attend events (online or face to face) at least 4 times a year

What you can expect from the OU Students Association:
- Support from the Area Representatives, Vice President Community and the Association staff team in Milton Keynes throughout your time as an Ambassador.
- Access to a monthly volunteer newsletter to inform you of what’s going on in the Students Association.
- A volunteer handbook outlining all polices and support you can access. Within this will be a guide to the Association and the services they offer, to help you in your role.
- An induction and full training appropriate to your role, this will include the opportunity to attend online training and support sessions.
- We will reimburse all reasonable expenses.
- To develop transferable skills and confidence.
- When you start in this role you will receive a guide to the Association and its services and will have the opportunity to take part in an online introductory training session.
- You will receive regular support from an Area Association Representative who will be there to help you throughout your time as a volunteer in this role.
- You will have the opportunity to network with other Student Association Ambassadors through a dedicated online forum.
- Meet other student and have fun!

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
Application Process:
Please apply here (webform)

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
**Annex 4**

**Meet and Greet's**
You're invited to the Students Association ‘Meet and Greets’ where you get an opportunity to meet your elected student reps ask any questions, raise any concerns and meet other students.
Come along and learn more about your Students Association, what your representatives do for you on a daily basis and see how you can get involved and shape the future of the Open University,
These will take place across the UK and online to give you as many opportunities as possible to have your voice heard and engage with your Association.

**Possible Where's...**

**Possible Timetable**

**Ireland (Alternate)**

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<thead>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
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**Scotland**

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<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
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<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>May 2018</td>
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**Wales**

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conwy/Llandudno</td>
<td>March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiff</td>
<td>July 2018</td>
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**England**

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<td>October 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth/Southampton</td>
<td>December</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<td>MK</td>
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<td>Nottingham/Birmingham</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>June 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>August 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online Meet & Greets

- Early October
- Early January
- Early April
- Early July

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External Engagement Volunteer

Overview of role…
We are looking for enthusiastic volunteers in Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland to help us promote the Students Association and engage with external stakeholders. You will work alongside the Area Association Representative (AAR) for Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland to represent student views in the wider Higher Education and political landscape.

Essential for role:
OU Students who want to engage with students, staff and other stakeholders (including politicians, policy makers and members of the public) and who have an interest in Higher Education policy in their nation.

Willingness to read and discuss papers at both University and Government level. This role may also involve public speaking, for example at committees, conferences and events.

Supported by:
You will be supported in your role from our team of elected student representatives including your elected National Area Association Representative (AAR), other elected representatives and our Volunteering team. Contact details can be found in your volunteer handbook.

Main responsibilities:
You will assist the AAR for Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland by attending events and conferences and sitting on committees relevant to H E policy. This work may also include supporting the work of the OU in Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland and attending OU events as requested.

Your views will help to inform OU Student Association responses to consultations on issues that will affect OU students in Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland, assisting the AAR to gather student opinion on these issues and feedback to students in your area via Student Association forums, social media and at face to face events. You will also support the AAR with appointments specific to Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland for example, to the Senate Reference Group and other relevant committees.

Desired skills:
- Good communication skills, written and verbal
- A willingness to engage with students
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team
- Belief in the OU Students Association mission statement and objectives

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.
What the OU Students Association expect from you in this role:
- To act professionally whilst in your role
- To ensure that you act in a way which reflects our commitment to Equality and Diversity (our expectations of volunteers can be found in your handbook)
- Where possible, to attend events (online or face to face) at least 4 times a year these may be during the week or at weekends.

What you can expect from the OU Students Association:
- Support from the Area Representative for Wales/Scotland/Northern Ireland, Student Association officers and the Association staff team in Milton Keynes
- Access to a monthly volunteer newsletter to inform you of what's going on in the Students Association
- A volunteer handbook outlining all polices and support you can access. Within this will be a guide to the Association and the services they offer, to help you in your role.
- Induction and full training appropriate to your role, this will include the opportunity to attend online training and support sessions
- Reasonable expenses for travel and subsistence will be paid for attendance
- We will reimburse all reasonable expenses
- Opportunity to develop transferable skills and confidence
- When you start in this role you will receive a guide to the Association and will have the opportunity to take part in an online introductory training session.
- You will have the opportunity to share experiences and ideas with other External Engagement Volunteers through a dedicated online forum.
- Meet other student and have fun!

Application Process:
Please apply here (webform)

Annex’s to this paper are found at the end of the document, attachments are separate documents.