The CEC is asked to:

i) note the findings of the working group

ii) note the new structure

iii) approve the new structure

1. Background

1.1 The OU Students Virtual Learning Environment suite of forums currently has over 400 sub forums and is difficult to navigate through. These forums are protected by the university firewall and require logging in to Student Home, therefore they are the safest space for students to participate in discussion with other students.

2. Proposal

2.1 This paper has been written to propose an update for these forums. We wish to encourage students and members of this committee to utilise the space and feel protected whilst doing so. Currently these forums are underused and most communication and news from the Association is based on social media. Using just social media to promote regular communications is creating a barrier for students who do not wish to participate in social media spaces.

2.2 This project is part of the bigger VLE review, further projects will be ongoing throughout the rest of the current CEC’s term and possibly beyond. Therefore, we are recommending a full restructure of the OU Students Suite of forums. We will be first looking at the main forums, these are the forums that students see when they click on community from student home

https://learn1.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?name=OUSA-STUDENTS

2.3 The aim for these forums is to make them more accessible, less cluttered, encourage more students to participate and to provide a space that mirrors
the social media, email, and website communications.

3. **Working group**

3.1 After the CEC in April, a smaller working group was created; this working group included Stephanie Stubbins (VP Community), Cath Brown (FAR STEM), Cherry Day (VP Equal Opportunities), Peter Cowan (VP Admin and CAP Chair), Anca Seaton (AAR England), Cinnomen McGuigan (AAR Northern Ireland) along with support from myself, Magda Hadrys and OUSA Controller.

4. **Site maps**

4.1 We have decided to use a blank forum to create these forums and will clearly signpost to redirect to the new space. For ease of explanation for the new forums, I have attached each site map for the following headings.

- Community
- Student Support
- Student Voice
- Volunteering

4.2 As mentioned in the last paper, this working group has purely focused on the structure of these forums. Content will be created once we have the clear structure. We will be moving some content from the existing forum (societies, the hobbies and interest’s forums and the study support forums*)

*the study support forums will be grouped under the new faculties.

4.3 **Please note** that this structure can be added to if there is a clear argument, we are trying to make these forums easy to navigate and clearly defined. There will be a specific forum created for the CEC members to post their additional requests for new forums to be created and included in the new structure. There will be two week window after the CEC weekend. Link will be provided to all. Please note that any new request will need to go through the normal procedures for forum requests. Student requests for forums are on hold until after this redevelopment. We will have a very short window to implement and create these forums for the launch in the first week of October in line with the 17J presentation.

4.4 This redevelopment will be reviewed in December 2017, with the next phase of development (other forums behind the OU Students forums) starting in March 2018.

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