The CEC is asked to:-

i) comment on the draft strategy objectives and actions

ii) agree on any additions or subtractions

iii) comment on the additional suggestions made in this paper

iv) endorse the strategy for presentation to the Board of Trustees on 27 July 2017 for their final approval

1. Background

1.1 Our previous strategy was designed to cover the 2015-18 period, but with a rolling annual action plan. It was agreed that we should revisit and reshape this strategy in 2017 ready for the final year of the current elected term and the forthcoming election and induction of the team that will follow.

1.2 A strategy workshop was held on Sunday 23 April 2017, facilitated by a member of staff from the University's Strategy and Information Office. This workshop revisited the four previously agreed objectives of our 2015-18 Strategy and our organisational values, in order to arrive at an agreed set of values and objectives to take the organisation forward in recognition of what had been achieved from the previous strategy and in recognition of what had changed.

1.3 Participants in the workshop included CEC members, an observer from the Board of Trustees, members of our staff team and a number of student observers. In groups, we considered what had been achieved from the previous strategy, the major internal and external drivers affecting the Students Association and what had changed since the last strategy was developed in 2014/15. It was generally agreed, despite some disagreement over precise wording, that there were three main objectives emerging in our discussions which covered the main areas of work that we wanted to achieve over the coming period. It was felt that the previous objective area around
exercising good governance should move from being an objective for action to being one of our organisational values and therefore something that we seek to do as part of our ongoing work.

1.4 It was recognised that 2018 will see the election of a new Central Executive Committee and Board of Trustees who will bring in new ideas. Therefore the strategy should be open to review during their term, with a clear action to undertake a student-facing strategy review on a biennial basis. A three year term was proposed for the draft strategy presented here, to give some scope for longer term change beyond short term projects.

1.5 Following the workshop, a new set of three forums were opened for members of the CEC, Board of Trustees and staff team to post and comment on suggested actions which could form part of our work under each of the three proposed objectives. These forums remained open for a month and a number of suggestions were made. On the 29 June 2017, the staff management team held a further session to go through each of the suggestions that had been made and further develop the idea to include potential timescales, ownership and milestones. This content has formed the draft strategy action plan presented for further comment at appendix 2.

2. **Taking stock: An overview of achievements from our previous strategy**

2.1 The previous strategy has driven a number of changes within the Students Association and in our relationship with the University. Some changes were hugely significant for the future of the Students Association including the implementation of one-member-one-vote elections, introduction of Faculty-based representation, review of our future regional structure, a revitalised brand for the Students Association, beginning the work on a new website and membership database, improving the induction and training of volunteers, the introduction of paid roles for our President and Deputy President and the founding of the through the gate service.

2.2 Other actions have begun and are in their implementation phase including re-running the OU staff and Associate Lecturer awareness survey and the joint University and Students Association Student Engagement Project.

2.3 Some actions had been proved to be wrongly pitched or overly-ambitious for the strategy's term, including the development of a new social media tool for the student community and the exploration of individual representation which remains an area of development that would be valued by our students but where we have not secured the University's commitment to the potential financial implications.

2.4 Some remain as actions we wish to take under the new strategy, including expanding study buddies and the Peer Support service now that we have added the staff capacity to support them, expanding our volunteering offer, improving the way that we debate and make policy, improving how we communicate achievements in policy and representation to the wider student body and exploring mentoring.
### 3. The drivers affecting our work

#### 3.1 During the course of the workshop on 23 April 2017, we identified and discussed a number of internal and external drivers affecting our work. We defined internal drivers as being those within the Students Association and student community whilst the external drivers were those from outside of the Students Association, including changes within the OU and forces affecting it.

#### 3.2 The table below outlines some of the most pressing or concerning drivers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Drivers</th>
<th>External Drivers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Awareness of the Students Association remains a major issue. Improvements have been noted amongst new students, but there is much still to do about this across our very existence, services, actions and offer to students.</td>
<td>Changes within the University: change is the new normal. We must be able to understand and influence this change on behalf of our members. The major OU Redesign (Students First Transformation) programme is just one of many changes, including the end of transitional arrangements and the move to digital by design.</td>
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<td>Change and relationships: there are lots of new people getting involved in volunteering for roles, standing for election and voting under one-member-one-vote, new staff members. Managing and integrating the change and new faces should be a major focus moving forward, particularly due to the issues such change has caused and could cause for us moving forward.</td>
<td>More calls on our time: Linked to the amount of change and our relationship with the University, our elected team are under greater pressure on their time than ever before, particularly but not limited to the President role.</td>
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<td>Slimming resources: we won't have large reserves in the future and the likelihood of major increases in funding from the University appear to be slim. We must look to new ways to generate funds and take a greater focus on demonstrating impact for each pound spent.</td>
<td>Carving out our own agenda amongst the noise: We must keep pushing the Students Association forward, ensuring that we develop to achieve our potential. We have come a long way, but we have much more to do. We cannot be complacent and nor can we simply become reactive to the changes that the University is making at the cost of our own aims and agenda. Striking a balance remains one of our greatest challenges to balance.</td>
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<td>Student demographics are shifting: do we have a clear understanding of what our current and future members will want from their Students Association? Factors within our demographics are also impacting on our work and priorities, e.g. mental health remains an under-resourced concern.</td>
<td>External policy changes: the lack of Government support for part-time study in England, the different environments in the Nations and the host of policy and regulatory changes e.g. TEF, degree apprenticeships, impacts of Brexit, devolution, maintenance loans and a host of other impacts are impacting upon the OU and will impact upon us.</td>
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Issues in representation: we need to ensure that we represent the full student community in an effective manner, including hearing from a wider selection of students. The remits of the elected team need a major overhaul to ensure that they represent fully the responsibilities, are accessible and transparent to those outside the inner workings of the Students Association and have a greater focus on the time commitments of the roles. We also need to ensure that we protect role-holders from excessive calls on their time, not least the President.

Institutional commitment to student engagement and hearing the student voice.

4. Draft strategy and action plans

4.1 The draft objectives from the workshop are shown at appendix 1, with the draft strategy and action plans presented for comment and changes at appendix 2.

4.2 CEC members are asked to suggest additions and subtractions to the action plans and to the objectives and values.

4.3 Comments are particularly invited on the organisational values, particularly how we might capture the text currently shown in red into a new fifth value as suggested at the workshop.

4.4 Members are also invited to comment on whether we might include an action plan for enabling actions to support our three main objectives and reinforce our values. These could include actions dedicated to supporting our staff, ensuring good governance, maintaining our relationship with the University, mitigating the impact of Conference organisation on our other stated aims and actions, implementing our new website and membership database in line with regulatory changes (including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)).

5. Next steps

5.1 Following comments from CEC members and staff, a final version will be drafted for presentation to the Board of Trustees for approval on 27 July 2017. Following approval, we will produce the strategy in a more engaging format for wider publication including a one-page overview.

Rob Avann
General Manager