INTRODUCTION

1 This report is provided in compliance with the statutory requirements under section 22 of the Education Act 1994 and in line with Appendix 1 of the formal OU-OUSA Relationship Agreement.

2 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of OUSA activities and achievements during the preceding financial year which ran 1st August 2013 to 31st July 2014, in addition to our last set of audited accounts and a statement regarding elections run during this period. Finally, there is a brief summary of some of our plans for the current period and near future, details of which may be expected in next year’s report.

3 In addition to these formal requirements and in the context of our ongoing relationship, OUSA also takes this opportunity to raise particular challenges which we are experiencing and to highlight for praise particular contributions or assistance which we may have received over the period.

PRIORITIES FOR FEEDBACK

4 At the outset of the 2013/14 year, the OUSA Central Executive Committee (CEC) identified four priority areas for targeted action as part of our wider strategy. These were Awareness, Engagement, Satisfaction and Infrastructure. These four areas have been used here as chapters for feedback on the year.

AWARENESS

5 OUSA recognises awareness as an Achilles heel for the organisation. OU students are a disparate population in excess of 200,000 people spread across the 4 UK Nations, Ireland and continental Europe. Our first challenge as a students association is to make students aware of our existence and our offer to them. Our first communications to new students must be impactful and effective, creating a positive image of our organisation and drawing in their attention to our main communications channels via our website, social media and e-magazine.

6 The scale of our challenge in raising awareness of OUSA’s existence is significant when contrasted to our peer student unions across the UK who operate to some degree within a campus-based teaching setting allowing them direct physical access to their students, even if it is simply attracting them into a union building containing retail and entertainment outlets which can then feed in to wider awareness.

7 We rely on working with the University to allow us access to contacting our own members, using University email communication systems and University databases to do so. We are also always keen to see the University help to market our existence as part of the student community. However, we are not simply waiting for the University to raise awareness of our organisation. We are working hard on increasing our reach and the impact of our communications and several significant developments occurred during the 2013/14 year.
In November 2013 we launched our brand new re-modelled and re-designed website at open.ac.uk/ousa. We worked with an external design agency in addition to OU colleagues to completely overhaul the appearance, flow and content of the site and the feedback shows it has been very warmly received by students and by University colleagues. The website particularly came into its own in the lead-up and delivery of our Conference in June 2014, which is discussed in more detail below. Our website is our one-stop-shop for everything OUSA: it contains regular news bulletins, links to our social media sites, details of all our major services and volunteering opportunities for students, overviews of our governance structure and the students performing our major Executive remits. The site also includes the provision to run and broadcast online events, which we put to good use with both our Freshers and Conference activities this year.

In Autumn 2013, we re-modelled and re-branded our e-magazine in line with our social media brand. We undertook an evaluation of our previous offer and made wholesale changes to the design, imagery, features, style and length in addition to moving to seasonal distribution. The first edition in the new format included a survey for students to comment on the overhaul and suggest any other changes, which resulted in overwhelming support and interest for the new brand and a surge in articles being provided by students. We continue to track readership figures with an average click-through rate for each edition in excess of 60,000.

In February 2014, we trialled the very first virtual Freshers Fair for OU Students. We built a special Freshers site on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and designed resources based around ten top tips for new OU students. These ten top tips were set following a very successful social media campaign we did under #new2OU, where we asked current students to highlight the advice they’d share with new students, the things they look at most and the hints that they wish someone had shared with them when they first started. The campaign really took off and the ten top tips became the key ‘calls to action’ that formed the homepage for the site, with each tip linking to further detail and content behind each point. We also gleaned student feedback on how they use their Studenthome page to enable us to build a screencast that we featured as a centrepiece on the site, talking new students through the most useful sections they should look at and where they could find the key information they really needed. A second screencast informed students about how to get involved with their student community, highlighting the most popular forums and our social media presence. Finally, we recognised that most OU students may never get a chance to see the Milton Keynes campus and so we provided a virtual tour of the site, picking up on many of the main features.

This first pilot was tremendously popular with 2,500 students using the Freshers resources and we received very positive feedback. Our #new2OU campaign reached over 18,000 people with more than 800 comments. However the key success of this pilot was that it laid the groundwork for the larger scale Freshers project that would occur in September 2014 and it showed that a virtual fair could be successful.

We do want to draw attention to the September 2014 follow up, as it would otherwise be another year before we could report back on it and we don’t want to lose the moment in highlighting just how successful it became. A two week virtual Freshers Fair was arranged and hosted via our website and we also linked in with OU colleagues to promote the two-day Student Hub live event which occurred during the fortnight. We hosted four student Q&A events via Facebook, with the Library, Careers, Associate Lecturer and member of our Central Executive Committee all doing very well attended slots. We also worked closely with the fantastic team at the Knowledge Media Institute (KMi) to run the first-ever OUSA Radio broadcast for a two hour topical chat show with a range of features about OUSA and key guests from the University popping in to answer questions from our studio hosts and from callers phoning in to the OUSA office. This was so successful that we are now looking to make OUSA Radio a regular feature, with another slot being arranged.
before Christmas and again for the February Freshers Fair. With the Freshers Fair being hosted on our website, our analytics have shown the following great results:

a) The email promotions to 25,591 new students resulted in 23,519 visits to our Freshers Fair pages at open.ac.uk/ousa/freshers.

b) 7,653 Facebook users engaged with our #new2OU content

c) In the two week period, we gained 2067 new likes on Facebook and 923 new Twitter followers

d) Our video welcome from our Deputy President, Nik Morris, had 2000 views

e) The two-hour OUSA Radio segment was listened to 2,232 times with 85% using the listen again function

f) The 4 Facebook Q&A sessions had 199 posters, with 464 watching the events live

g) Students looked at a breadth of information on our pages: 8400 wanted to know about NUS discount cards, 4000 about our merchandise for sale, 3200 wanted to know more about the role of an Associate Lecturer, 3100 wanted to know more about our student societies, 780 wanted to know about our volunteering opportunities, 690 watched our Studenthome screencast and 430 wanted to know how they could access help or peer support.

h) The anecdotal feedback has also been impressive, with students thanking OUSA for the Freshers Fair and the OUSA radio broadcast. Our task now is to keep the momentum going with a bigger and better event in February 2015.

We have completely re-worked our welcome message which is sent out to new OU students following each new presentation and we are seeing significant traffic to both our welcome forum and our Freshers resources. In addition, our social media community continues to grow month by month, with 10,500 Twitter followers and 15,500 Facebook likes for our OU students communities.

It is also pertinent here to take the opportunity to draw attention to the positive relationship we have with the Director of Communications and his staff. Credit is due to their hard work in supporting OUSA activity, working closely with our own VP Communications and members of our staff team. We are grateful for this support which we view as a very positive two-way relationship.

ENGAGEMENT

One of our proudest achievements this year has been to put together an Open University team that has made it on to University Challenge for the first time since 1999. We undertook a much wider and higher profile selection process this year, with our early communications resulting in over 300 students registering their interest in being part of a team. We auditioned over 100 students through a series of online and face to face events, resulting in the final 10 candidates undertaking a live practice event in January 2014 in front of an audience of students and OU staff where we were very happy to have Professor David Rothery playing the quizmaster role. Our selection process was so thorough this year that we attracted considerable interest from the BBC production team, culminating in their attendance at the live practice event. We were also heavily featured on the BBC’s ‘Class of 2014’ taster programmes in July 2014 which showed our team in action and the moment that we received news that they had made it through to the televised rounds for the first time in 14 years.
December 2013 saw the roll out of our research project which focused on students’ module selections. This project specifically sought to identify the common positive and negative factors which influence the module choices that students make; to identify any equality and diversity implications resulting from factors affecting specific student groups; to recommend factors which could improve student registration, retention and success on modules; and finally to explore ways to assist student decision making through the provision of information. A social media launch including a video address about the research from our Vice-President (VP) Educational Support and Research reached over 5,000 students with more than 250 comments to a series of taster questions that were put to the community. Our research forum on the OUSA Students VLE site received more than 100 valuable comments over the duration of the research project. The project was carried out via a series of semi-structured interviews in two stages, the first to hone in on the key common factors for deeper exploration, the second stage focusing in further on the student journey of the participants to understand and appreciate the relative importance of the common factors and how this differed between experienced and inexperienced students. 20 students were recruited via a sample and interviewed as part of stage two and the qualitative research technique allowed in-depth analysis of their journeys.

At all stages of the project, a series of infographics were produced to provide a snapshot of progress and this was shared with students who had taken part in addition to carefully-selected series of University colleagues who may be interested in the eventual results. The findings were eventually split into module factors affecting choice and motivating factors affecting the journey. Due to relative size of the interview sample, these factors have been mapped and triangulated against findings appearing from other projects within the University and are consistent with the findings from the recent National Student Survey which provided more than 500 responses as a comparison. We have also worked with University colleagues to plot the projects where we feel the findings can be utilised as part of the evidence base and we are working with leads where relevant to ensure wider awareness. The full findings report can be viewed on our website here.

OUSA held two well-attended open briefing events in May 2014 to share the methodology and findings with the OU community and there was significant interest in further sharing and discussion of the factors. OUSA would like particularly to thank the Student Statistics and Survey team within the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) for their support, wisdom and valuable assistance without whom, the project would not have been possible. We also wish to recognise the contribution of the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC) for their significant interest in the findings and support for the project in general. We look forward to fostering further interest and working together on future OUSA research projects in what is a new direction for OUSA, but one that we feel will bring many benefits in evidence-based decision making and bringing the student voice to the fore.

Our Conference 2014 was a huge success. It carried the branding #getOUSA14 which enabled us to use the ‘get’ theme for all aspects of the process. The strapline for the Conference materials was “get inspired, get engaged, get involved” and for the elections process we utilised “get interested, get nominated”. Conference took place on the Milton Keynes campus over the weekend of 27 – 29th June 2014 and we had 313 student delegates in attendance, with a further 158 delegates joining the simultaneous online broadcasts via Livestream plus a host of guests and visitors joining the audience. Delegates this year heard keynote speeches which included the Speaker of the House John Bercow MP, who gave a lively speech and answered plenty of questions from both the floor and the online delegates in addition to stating his support and assistance for any future initiative we want to take up with him. He was followed the next day by the Lord Speaker Baroness D’Souza who gave a very interesting examination of the history of the House of Lords and its future, in addition to taking a series of questions from the floor and engaging with our online delegates in a very special online question and answer session.
(Q&A) immediately following her speech. The programme had a very good spread of activities for students to get involved in, including a vast array of workshops, seminars and activities from across OUSA and the University community on all sorts of interesting themes. There were too many people involved to thank them all here, but we are very grateful for the level of interest and commitment we received.

A significant communications drive was undertaken in advance of Conference, leading to the majority of delegate places being taken up within hours of the opening of registration. Our conference messages on social media, using the hashtag #getOUSA14 had a reach of over 53,000 on Twitter and 44,000 on Facebook resulting in 377 likes, shares and comments. We could have registered many more delegates than we had capacity for, but the conversion rate of 77% of registered delegates attending the event was much improved over past years and provides a real foundation to build upon. Some highlights from our post-Conference evaluation (which can be read in full via our website [here](#)) included:

- 95% of students felt welcomed to Conference
- 95% were satisfied with the registration process via Eventbrite
- 94% knew how to get around from the information provided
- 88% were satisfied with the elections process
- 75% felt they left knowing a lot more about OUSA
- More than 50% of face-to-face delegates and 70% of online delegates said they wanted to get more involved in OUSA in the future
- 50% indicated the most important part of Conference was the opportunity to meet other students and make new friends, feeling part of the student community
- We received a host of comments and messages thanking OUSA Officers and staff for making the weekend so special for delegates and many of these can be found in the Conference evaluation.

However, we also know there is much to be done to ensure that we do not lose the momentum with students who attended and we maintain their engagement in the future and this is a key focus for OUSA. We also know that there is work to be done to truly make the online element feel as integrated as possible and whilst we made a huge step forward with that this time, we are aware that it was the online element that had the largest drop-out rate between registration and actual attendance and more work is being done to learn the lessons from this ready for the next Conference in 2016. We also have much work to do to ensure a wider array of candidates standing for key roles as the final numbers of candidates standing did not match the significant interest in the elections process with over 790 unique visits to our elections pages on the Conference website in the lead up to the event. We are working to analyse and understand the reasons behind this.

We would like to take this opportunity to record our thanks to a number of University colleagues who made a significant contribution to helping us with the event. These include Audio-Visual, Estates, External Affairs, Catering, Disabled Student Services and KMi. All of these departments went above and beyond to assist in making the student experience as fantastic as it could be.

In early 2014, the new University Students Consultative Process was introduced following close work between OUSA and the Director, Students office. We have been pleased with the outcome, with great numbers of students taking part in consultations covering a vast
array of topics including careers and employability, the bullying and harassment policy, learning analytics and group tuition. OUSA was pleased that our call for student volunteers resulted in nearly 200 students expressing interest in joining the forums. OUSA is keen to support the impending evaluation to further the development of this process and heed some of the lessons of its inaugural year. The process is certainly not without issues to be ironed out, not least in the workload expected of student members of the various forums, but the demands placed upon it in terms of the number of possible consultation topics should be seen as a positive factor to build upon if we can develop the process of scheduling and recognise that time is a precious commodity to the majority of our students. OUSA has enjoyed regular dialogue with the Students Consultative Office and we would wish to highlight their significant positive contribution here. Many lessons have been learned from the face-to-face consultation events held in the Celtic Nations and the English Regions and we have fed back our concerns over ensuring agendas cover what students want to talk about and sessions are not dominated by personal issues or simply information-giving, with sufficient time for fuller discussion in an engaged manner.

In addition to these engagement activities, OUSA has also continued to attract student volunteers for roles across the organisation including forum moderators, peer supporters, central representatives, article authors for OU student magazine, degree ceremony and residential school representatives and many more. We have also recruited students for a number of events across the University and continue to support events wherever possible.

SATISFACTION

OUSA is driving to make sure that our offer to OU students is as good as it can be and we’re working to ensure that our services are as efficient and effective as possible. We’re also working hard on analysing and interpreting what the National Student Survey tells us about where we’re succeeding and where we have work to do.

We are particularly pleased with our results in the National Student Survey on Q23, which asks students if they are satisfied with their students association. We are pleased to have achieved two successive increases in our overall satisfaction level, from 58% in 2012 to 61% in 2013 and now 64% in 2014. We hope to maintain this momentum but are not complacent that there is not a lot more to do to be where we would like to be. The headline results do not tell the whole story and we have made use our new research function to go beneath the surface and analyse what the statistics tell us, sharing methods with our peers in other student associations. The way that respondents have answered Q23 informs us that many more students were aware of OUSA in the 2014 survey than was the case in 2013, which signifies gradual success in our communications activity. It also informs us that where students are aware of OUSA, they have responded positively in terms of their satisfaction. Therefore, it appears to signify that our ‘fit’ as an association is strong, but our ‘awareness’ is where we have much work to do. We will return to discuss this later in this report under challenges where we call upon the University to help us.

During 2014, we have completely overhauled our merchandise for sale through our trading company OUSA (Services) Ltd, modernising the products and clothing and listening to student feedback. We have undertaken a thorough review of the range, including exploring the products offered by our peers in the student movement and analysing the results of our research project which sought to understand our market, their spending preferences and their desire for certain types of products. Our Operations team have scoured the market to find high calibre, great quality products at affordable prices to offer a very comprehensive range. The new product line was soft-launched in the summer to great student feedback and orders are showing steady growth, with a surge in interest as a result of our Freshers activities. We are now working on establishing a new webstore which will provide much better accessibility and user friendly features for our customers.
and together we believe the re-vitalised product range and webstore will project a fantastic image of OUSA in addition to delivering the projected increase in sales.

28 During the winter of 2013/14, we worked closely with other colleagues within the University and the wider student movement to develop and deliver the campaign to protect the Student Opportunities Fund allocation. OU students backed this campaign strongly, with a fantastic response across social media. We have received good feedback from our students and peers about our contribution to this campaign which touched a chord with so many of our members.

INFRASTRUCTURE

30 This is the most inward facing of our priorities as it is the one that deals with our staffing, systems, services and structures.

31 As described in full in our last annual report, during 2013 OUSA undertook a major staff re-organisation project which culminated in the recruitment of six new staff members with a broad base of skills to enable us to deliver the changes necessary for our future. We were also very grateful for the fantastic support of the Estates department, who couldn’t have been more helpful in delivering a thorough refurbishment of our office accommodation and dealing with any query or issue we raised swiftly, effectively and with fantastic customer service.

32 In 2014, one of our significant changes has been the recruitment and induction of two external Trustees to sit on our Board in keeping with our Constitution. In February this year we ran an external recruitment campaign to find two highly skilled external Trustees to give their time and expertise to help the development of our organisation, initially on a 12 month pilot basis. Our Trustee board identified financial and legal expertise as being two of the most important skills that we sought to add. The advert ran nationally via a number of high profile outlets and we also made use of the University’s own alumni network, although prior experience of the University was not a key criterion due to the nature of the roles as Trustees. We were inundated with interest from quality applicants, with 15 making it through to the final short-listing. We met and interviewed with the four best candidates and the top two were invited to join our new Board following Conference. We have secured two highly experienced and high calibre individuals with the skills we sought and their impact and enthusiasm has already been felt within the Board. We look forward to developing this relationship over the coming months and to an evaluation of next steps early in 2015.

33 Conference 2014 elected a new Officer team, led by our OUSA President Ruth Tudor. All Officers took up their new positions for a two year term as of 1st August 2014. They were joined by a new Trustee board including the two external Trustees, and also by a new OUSA General Manager Rob Avann, all of whom also commenced in their roles as of the same date.

34 There is one significant new service to report on, Nightline, a new external relationship that we feel will benefit many OU students over the coming year and beyond. During the last year, we have worked closely with the University’s excellent Mental Health Advisor to re-draft OUSA policies on dealing with distressed and suicidal students, not only for our staff but for our numerous student forum moderators who can often be moderating forums late at night or over weekends, when the University’s own student support services are closed, but when the majority of students with study worries or looking for contact with other students make use of our facilities around their other life commitments. We regularly deal with students in a state of distress about their study or who feel overwhelmed emotionally with their level of stress or anxiety which can be triggered by all sorts of life events. Fortunately it has been relatively rare to deal with students who have made comments of concern about potentially harming themselves but we do deal with a handful of such issues each year in conjunction with colleagues in student services. OUSA
identified the need to provide the best possible support for our volunteer forum
moderators to debrief or otherwise deal with the implications of coming across fellow
students in distress, and whilst members of our office team are able to provide such
support, it raised with us the need to examine more closely what we might be able to do to
support students. We were particularly keen to explore the possibility of a Nightline
scheme and in early 2014 we met with the national scheme coordinator and the lead
officer from the largest scheme in the UK, London Nightline. Nightline is a student-to-
student confidential and anonymous listening and support service, which uses a variety of
means to make itself available to students including a telephone hotline, email, Skype and
instant messaging.

We worked closely with London Nightline, which already provides services to over
300,000 students at over 35 different London institutions, to broker a service agreement
for OU students which was subsequently funded for a one-year pilot by the OUSA Board
of Trustees. Lines are open between 6pm and 8am daily, having opened in late
September. Nightline usually runs during conventional University term dates, but OUSA
was able to broker six additional weeks opening for the pilot year with a will from both
sides to move towards full annual coverage in the future if service demand warrants it.
However, email support is available throughout closed periods and it should be noted that
London Nightline are seeing a very gradual migration towards written forms of contact as
opposed to telephone contact, with research showing that many students are more
comfortable expressing their concerns in writing as a first step. Research shows that
access to services such as the one that Nightline provides is incredibly important for
student communities and has huge benefits for student wellbeing which can only assist
the drive for retention and progression. In addition to providing OU students access to the
full Nightline service, our agreement has also opened up new volunteer opportunities for
our members. London Nightline provides accredited volunteer training for those who
become hotline volunteers operating from their base near London Euston and they also
provide opportunities for students to get involved in publicity and fundraising, all of which
are fantastic employability skills.

The pilot will run until June 2015, but a full evaluation and re-appraisal of the scheme will
take place early next year and OUSA is very keen to secure the University’s support for
future years. We have taken a leap of faith on our own this year to develop the opportunity
and see where it can lead, but all other scheme members of London Nightline are
partnerships between University and student union, with University welfare budgets
picking up the vast majority of the fees.

Our Peer Supporters scheme was re-launched early in 2014, following the resolution of a
number of technical glitches in the system which had prevented anonymous email access
for the volunteers. They are now back supporting fellow students with their student
journey and making their beneficiaries feel less isolated.

Some significant decisions about the future of OUSA’s structures and processes were
made by delegates at Conference 2014 in the shape of recommended changes to our
Constitution and Bye-laws. In keeping with the requirement in our Constitution in January
2014 OUSA held a rules revision convention which was attended by over 40 students,
many who had never been to an OUSA event before, which discussed and debated the
big questions around how OUSA should be governed, what our elected roles should cover
and how many they should number and how our election processes could be streamlined
and opened up. The discussions were far-ranging, detailed and immensely beneficial to
assisting our Central Executive Committee with developing key proposals to be put
forward to Conference for debate and ultimately to be put to the vote by delegates. A
series of ten changes to our Constitution and three changes to our Bye-laws were put to
the vote, with all but two changes to the Constitution being passed by the vote.
The most significant change to the Constitution that received approval by Conference was a recommended move towards opening up Officer elections to one member one vote whereby in future it would not only be Conference delegates that got a vote for our elected Officer elections, but the whole student population subject to our rules on membership. This is a significant shift for OUSA and with the approval of Conference we are now working on the details of how we might achieve this aim. All changes to our Constitution will be coming before Council in 2015 for approval in line with our duty under Section 22 of the Education Act 1994.

PLANS FOR 2014-15 AND BEYOND

We have many plans for 2014-15 and more yet to come once we have completed the development of a new OUSA Strategy for the future, which will be action-focused and place emphasis on a small number of core priorities. However there are a number of activities planned for this year that we can report on here.

OUSA is currently undergoing a branding transformation, working with a designer to set a new brand in place including a core logo that accurately projects our image. This follows recent work to develop a house style including a colour palette and icons for use across our website, literature and merchandise offer. We expect the new branding to be in place early in 2015 and recipients will see our old branding begin to be replaced immediately afterwards.

As part of the preparation work for our new strategy, we are currently undertaking a thorough analysis of where we are and where we want to be. As part of this work, we are utilising our research function to undertake the largest survey of our membership that we have yet completed, the ‘get engaged’ survey. The aim of the survey is to get to the heart of what OUSA should provide for our students, what they want from us, what they value, and how we can re-focus our efforts to do the best things for our student community. This has been distributed to a host of OU students from a variety of backgrounds using a sample provided by the Student Statistics and Survey team in IET and we have, at the time of writing, received in excess of 550 responses from students and the early findings are fascinating. Once the project is complete, we will be sharing the results and analysing where they will lead OUSA in the future. There are many big issues at stake for OUSA to consider, including how we can engage students in standing for roles with responsibility in the future and considering how we can overcome the barriers that are identified through the research. We will be undertaking further research projects in 2015, including an evaluation of the Nightline service and work around how we can continue to develop volunteering opportunities.

December 2015 will see the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Review visit and we will be spending the next few months preparing the student submission. We are working closely with the Quality office and will be ensuring that we collate as much student feedback as possible to inform the process.

February 2015 will see another virtual Freshers Fair hosted on our website and we are looking to build upon the successes of our last two events as discussed above. Work is already under way on planning the programme and activities, using the lessons from the latest version and the analytics as a key driver in developing the content and programme.

We will be looking to increase interest in our student societies and running a drive for new societies, following the feedback we’ve received via Conference delegates and those using the Freshers Fair who were very interested in finding out more and forming a few new ones.

Early in 2015 we will be looking to recruit to two remaining vacancies within our staff structure, a Deputy General Manager and a Communications Intern. The Intern role seeks to offer a recent graduate an opportunity to join our Communications and Technology
team to gain experience and enhance their skills in the workplace with a view to using the role as a platform to gaining long term employment. We will be setting out a learning plan for the post-holder, paying above the living wage and seeking to give them some real projects to get involved in.

We will be looking to further our excellent working relationship with the Director, Students office across three particular projects: defining student engagement; reviewing the student charter and relationship agreement at the one year mark; and seeking to implement better email communication tools for OUSA beyond the current system.

During 2015 we will be seeking to develop, test and embed other new forms of communications media to enhance awareness and engagement including regular OUSA radio broadcasts following the success of the pilot; further exploring regular podcasting; and seeking to trial a fully online event outside of Conference.

We once again be promoting student take up of the National Student Survey, seeking to improve response rates once again and we will be very interested to see our 2015 result on Q23.

We will be implementing the changes voted for at Conference and beginning to develop plans for the 2016 event.

OUSA (Services) Ltd will be implementing a new webstore to market their products. A detailed specification has been drawn up following an analysis of competitor sites and available packages. A process is underway to select a successor webstore and we hope to have this in place in early 2015 as a new home for the new product range.

The Open University Students Educational Trust, OUSET, has a new chairperson this year in our Immediate Past President, Marianne Cantieri. We are continuing to support students in financial need and amongst Marianne’s immediate priorities is to explore the potential of supporting research students in the future and further promoting the availability of OUSET without provoking an avalanche of applications.

A lot to do in the next year, but we look forward to feeding back on the impact we have made with these exciting developments.

MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR 2015

In this section, we outline some concerns we would like to highlight for the Council’s support.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) remains a major challenge for OUSA, specifically in relation to its function in assisting to provide and foster a vibrant student community via the online forums and associated sites. Unfortunately this was an issue we raised in this very report last year and there has not been the progress we envisaged following the very positive response we received at the time. The VLE remains as lacking for this function as was the case 12 months ago and this was part of the reason that we migrated our Freshers Fair from the VLE and onto our own website to improve the look, feel and usability. However we can report that new OUSA President Ruth Tudor and new OUSA Deputy President Nik Morris have had a number of positive meetings with Learning and Teaching Solutions and we retain our hope that this situation will improve if the will is there to build a vibrant student community, which we believe is core to the University’s future offer to the new breed of students. We hope we still have Council’s support in providing an emphasis on resolving the concerns of our members.

We look forward to assisting the implementation process following the academic governance review, although we would like to highlight here that we remain concerned at the implications of the fusing of a number of the middle tier committees in terms of the
workloads this will create for our student central representatives and the possible loss of good discussion time for key items from main agendas. It is crucial that we can work out these details.

57 It was raised above that awareness remains a key issue for OUSA and this is an area where we do require the University’s support in ensuring students hear about their student community and where they can find OUSA. We hope that the ongoing email communications project will result in a better tool for OUSA to use that will make our first messages to new students look far more appealing and engaging than is possible with the fading CAMEL system’s block text features. This is a key issue because we only get one opportunity to create a first impression and if we lose students through our first message to them it is exceptionally difficult to re-kindled their interest. We would also like to see much more mention of OUSA in the University’s marketing approaches to students, under the banner of providing a vibrant community, as we believe we have role to play in building the supportive network around a student that can provide some of the difference in retention.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

58 We would like to make note here that the 31st July 2014 saw the end of the terms of our previous elected Officer team, including most notably OUSA President since 2011 Marianne Cantieri who led OUSA through a series of far-ranging positive changes during her time as President. We are however very glad that Marianne is continuing with OUSA and providing her leadership to OUSET for the next two years.

59 The other outgoing Officers who have moved on are Hazel Pegg, Jon Rainford and Sandra Summers, all of whom made a significant positive impact on OUSA during their term and deserve our thanks for their contributions.

60 The new Officer team for the next two years, as of 1st August 2014, consists of:
Ruth Tudor, OUSA President
Nik Morris, Deputy President
David Humble VP Administration
Lorraine Adams VP Communications
Josh Brumpton, VP Education Policy
Peter Cowan VP Educational Support & Research
Sue Goodyear, VP Representation
Alison Kingan, VP Student Support
Carey Shaw, continues as OU Council Member.

61 Our final note here is to recognise that July 2014 also saw the retirement of our previous General Manager Trudi de Haney, after 15 years with OUSA. We wish her well for her retirement in France.

Marianne Cantieri, OUSA President to 31.7.2014
Ruth Tudor, OUSA President from 1.8.2014

Attachments:
C-2014-04-17 Appendix 1 Compliance Statement
C-2014-04-17 Appendix 2 OUSA Consolidated Accounts 2012-13