Policy Statements

Of

Open University Students Association

(An Unincorporated Association)

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1. Policies Relating to OUSA

A. OUSA Equal Opportunities

1. General Policy One

This Association is committed to equality of opportunity in every field of its activities and to the concept of one Student Association, seeking to represent all students of the Open University. It is dedicated to identifying and eliminating inequality and valuing diversity within both the Association and the Open University.

2. General Policy Two

This Association calls upon all student, academic, educational and government institutions to recognise all students as being of equal status. It urges the University to publicise the support available to all students, not just those who declare a disability or additional requirements for study, and to ensure that all venues used for University activities be accessible to anyone with mobility or other difficulties.

With the student's permission information concerning the student’s additional needs should be made available to the relevant Associate Lecturers, residential school and other staff responsible for ensuring the quality of the student’s educational experience.

3. General Policy Three

This Association recognises the diversity of Open University students, that some students have additional needs and instructs the Central Executive Committee to:

a. ensure that this Association meets and, wherever possible, strives to exceed its obligations regarding any relevant current legislation.
b. encourage accessibility awareness by raising equal opportunities issues at all levels within the Association.
c. ensure that all units and affiliated societies are informed that the Disabled Students Group is a source of advice and information on issues relating to disability.
d. listen and respond to issues raised by students with additional needs and to represent the overall needs of these students to the University.
B. OUSA Organisation and Structure

a. Aims & Objectives

4. Apolitical Character
This Association shall be apolitical save for:

(a) activity that directly supports the Open University or its students.
(b) activity in the general field of education. Such activities should be vigorously pursued but will not be party political.

Affiliated societies may take political actions in their own names but should not associate such actions with the Association.

5. Politically Active in the Field of Higher Education
This Association believes that the Association should be politically active in the field of Higher Education whilst avoiding any allegiance to or association with the philosophy of any single political party.

6. Autonomous from O U
The Association welcomes co-operation with the University on matters relating to student interests. The Association, however, reaffirms its status as an autonomous body and its right to pursue the interests of its members without let or hindrance from the University.

7. Role Descriptions
The Association instructs the Executive Committee to ensure that there are clear and simple role descriptions for all positions in the formal structure including listing all Forums that the postholders should have permission to use and any committees they are expected to join, with frequencies. This to be kept up to date and issued to all postholders

8. Unpaid Volunteers
This Association will retain its tradition of Officers being unpaid, elected volunteers.

b. OSL

9. OSL Objectives
This Association confirms that the objectives of owning its trading company, OUSA (Services) Ltd, and the basis of its operation are as follows:-

a) Objectives
i. to act as a platform from which to promote the Association itself, enhancing its credibility with both students and the University and
encouraging the active participation of students within the main stream of OUSA work

ii. to act as a means of fostering a corporate identity for all students of the O U by providing goods which promote and enhance the image of the O U and give students a pride in being identified as O U students

iii. to provide goods and services for students which can be of real utility and benefit thereby enhancing the reputation of the Students Association

iv. to act as a means of promoting support for OUSET, the charity created and run by the Students Association.

b) Basis of Operation
to provide value for money
to sustain financial viability
to covenant any profits achieved to the Association with the purpose of enabling the Association to make donations to OUSET.

c. Residential Schools

10. Representation at OU Residential Schools

This Association instructs the Central Executive Committee to obtain representation rights for the Association at Open University residential schools.
2. Policies Relating to the Open University

A. Open University Administration

a. Collaboration

11. Student Representatives in Governance Structure

This Association calls on the University to ensure that –

- All student representatives to University Governance or consultative committees to be elected or appointed, as appropriate, by OUSA.
- Student representatives are able to consult students on issues arising in their committees and to report committee decisions, as long as they respect confidentiality measures dictated by the University.

b. General

12. Open University Business Policy

This Association calls upon the University to review any existing contracts to ensure that the supplier does not hold values that run counter to the University’s ethos and to cancel or not renew such existing contracts.

B. Open University Communication

13. Communications Systems

OUSA feels that it is incumbent on the University to do everything possible to support and assist OUSA in communicating with students, including the provision of communication systems for OUSA business, social and module forums that are fit for purpose and as accessible as possible.

We therefore ask the University to confirm its commitment to providing such support and stating clearly the ways in which that commitment will be demonstrated in practice.

14. Online Accessibility

This Association urges the Open University to make all its internet sites accessible, customisable, user-friendly and clearly navigable for all students and to set up a formal, accessible procedure for reporting accessibility and usability problems with the University’s web pages and web-based applications, with instructions for the procedure, and the information students need to provide, being made readily available to the Association.
15. Module Specific Online Forums

This Association believes that the module team should provide module specific online forums. Where they fail to do so, they should allow OUSA to establish OUSA moderated forums.

C. Open University Education

16. OUSA’s Educational Ethos in the OU

The policy of this association is:

- To ensure that all individuals have a right to access education to enable them to fulfil their potential and support the university’s commitment to being open to all, while acknowledging that the university has a duty to provide guidance to enable students to make appropriate choices, based on their prior learning or experience, for a successful educational experience.

- To influence the Open University to offer both undergraduate and postgraduate modules and qualifications that are relevant, globally recognized and transferable, while providing a diverse and comprehensive curriculum which maintains quality and consistency in content, presentation, assessment and all associated support systems.

- To require the university to communicate with all students in a timely and accessible manner; to publicise all modules widely with all details of physical and accessibility requirements fully explained and that alternative formats of materials are available.

17. Accurate Advice to Students

This Association calls on the University to provide accurate, consistent and timely advice to students about all aspects of their studies.

18. Examination Provision

The Association calls upon the University to provide appropriate working conditions for students sitting examinations.

Students with additional needs should be given adequate opportunity to notify the University and reasonable arrangements to meet these needs should be provided, with the student being informed in a timely manner.

19. Maximise Residential School Experience

This Association calls upon the University to recognise the importance of continuing to provide residential schools.
20. Animals in Experiments

This Association recognises the Open University’s endorsement of the principles of the 3 Rs (namely Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement) in its use of animals, and in order to demonstrate its continuing commitment to those principles we ask the University to make an annual statement giving numbers of animals used in research and in education, year – on – year, until five successive years are shown and thereafter show the figures for the current and the four preceding years, and that this report be sent to the General manager of OUSA for onward transmission to those who request it.

We also ask that the University:

- to encourage the development of teaching methods that do not use animals harmfully and ensuring that new modules avoid the use of animals except when there is no practical alternative
- encourage research students to discover and use methods that are not harmful to animals
- source any animal tissues or materials ethically
- to make it clear to students in the module choice publications and web pages that they will be able to opt out of animal experiments without penalty, and/or alternative methods of learning the same processes will be provided
- to include student representation on University Committees and Advisory Groups where animal use is tabled for discussion.

21. Student Rep Access to Papers

The Association urges the University to ensure that student representatives are given timely access to all relevant papers from the governance and consultative structure committees, on which OUSA has representation, be able to consult students on issues arising in their committees and to report the committee decisions, as long as they respect confidentiality measures dictated by the University.

D. Open University Equality and Equal Opportunity

22. Disability Policy

This Association recognises the differing needs of students with disabilities. To ensure that their experience with them is as positive as possible it urges the University to

a) give students the option to declare their disability status at registration
b) regularly review the information provided to disabled students so that it is clear, comprehensive and up to date
c make disability awareness training compulsory for all Associate Lecturers and staff members who have any contact with students
d hold all university events in venues which are accessible to students with mobility difficulties and those with hearing loss
e ensure accessibility of study material when developing new courses.

23. Teaching Material Policy

This Association considers all students have the right to expect accessible module materials and online forums which comply with the most up to date standards. The module descriptions should state which materials are not accessible.

24. Students in Prisons and Secure Units Policy

This Association recognises the value of Higher Education to those in prisons or secure units and calls upon the University to

a ensure that such students are able to study for a wide range of qualifications,
b use available technology to facilitate alternatives for on-line participation and group activities
c deploy a Virtual Campus which would be available to all students without access to the internet
d ensure that course teams develop alternatives to on-line or group activities in all new courses.

25. Students who are Carers Policy

To ensure that students who are carers achieve the best possible learning experience this Association urges the University to provide:

a comprehensive information regarding available support prior to the start of the module and regular updates throughout the students study
b home examinations to prevent disruption to caring responsibilities
c non face to face tutorials at a time that is convenient for the student to minimise disruption of caring responsibilities
d a tick box to indicate caring responsibilities at the time of registration.

26. University Bullying and Harassment Policy

This Association calls on the University to ensure that the ‘Student Code for Dealing with Bullying and Harassment’ is robust and utilised to ensure all incidents are responded to in an appropriate manner
27. Student Support Policy

This Association recognises the importance of student support and calls on the University to:

a) ensure a consistent high standard of support services across all Regions and Nations while recognising national differences
b) provide accurate advice about the support available to students.

E. Fees and Funding

28. European and Global markets

This Association believes in the great potential of the European and Global markets and urges the University to –

- Continue to investigate areas of expansion into these markets
- Make a Euro account available, for students living in the Eurozone
- Make use of the Single Euro Payment Area System.
3. Policies Relating to Other Institutions

29. Recognition of Qualifications

This Association –

- Urges the Open University to continue to negotiate the recognition of qualifications, outside the United Kingdom with the relevant national academic bodies.

- Resolves to cooperate as appropriate with other UK and EU student bodies to ensure that maximum pressure is brought to bear on national governments and the European institutions to achieve progress.

30. Public Funding for Higher Education

This Association believes that Governments should see public funding in Higher Education as an investment rather than a cost. Our priorities will be to maximise the influence of OU students on decision-makers by campaigning and lobbying to:-

- protect the right of open entry to our University

- protect and advance the University’s capacity to widen participation

- champion the cause of lifelong learning

- keep fees at affordable levels for all students wishing to benefit from study with the OU

- continue to press for the removal of the E L Q (equivalent or lower level qualifications) policy in England.

31. CALL

This Association recognises that in order to fulfil our commitment to “defend the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances” we need to be prepared to join with others within and beyond the Open University and to concern ourselves with educational opportunities more broadly than within the higher education sector.

In particular the Association endorses the decision of its Executive Committee to support CALL, the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning, and declares its support for the founding principles of CALL:-
1. quality of access to high quality education for all learners (regardless of: class, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, asylum status or employment status), including a statutory right to learning in the workplace.

2. universal access to basic skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) courses and a first level three qualification regardless of age.

3. learner, teacher and community involvement in all levels of decision-making about their learning wherever it takes place.

4. learning for personal wellbeing and development and the maintenance of local authority Adult Education.

5. a path out of poverty and disadvantage including widening participation in higher education and the provision of a second chance later in life.

6. a stable, motivated and rewarded workforce of professional practitioners.

As a supporter of CALL, OUSA will play an active role in the alliance and will work to encourage as many Open University students as possible to become active in support of the campaign.