

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)

25 – 27 January 2019

RESEARCH STRATEGY

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **approve** the aims and objectives set out in this paper.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Association's Research Strategy has been developed as part of aim L8 of the Association Strategy (2017-2020): 'To further our approach to evidence-led decision making'. This paper presents the full draft of our Research Strategy, listing the key aims and objectives for our research work during 2019-2020.
- 1.2 These aims were discussed with the student leadership team as part of a workshop held on Saturday 20 October, 2018. The way in which our research work continues to support different arms of the Association's work, the introduction of new research-focused volunteering activities and events, and the future shape and direction of our research were some of the points discussed during the workshop.
- 1.3 The feedback from this workshop has directly informed the objectives listed under each aim in this paper. Also recommended is an annual update to the CEC on the Research Strategy, detailing the ways in which we have progressed our objectives.

2. **Aim 1: 'To set out a clear mechanism to prioritise research projects'**

- 2.1 The research arm of our work at the Association offers all members of the student leadership team the opportunity to propose topics for research. Under this aim, we will develop mechanisms to ensure effective management of our resources, and make the identification and prioritisation of research topics a collective process.

- 2.2 Objective 1a: Introduce an annual cycle for inviting project proposals from the student leadership team. The April 2019 CEC meeting and/or a strategy weekend are suggested as potential dates for topics to be suggested and discussed collectively.
- 2.3 Objective 1b: Promote dialogue on research topics between the student leadership team. Once research topics are selected, it is suggested that follow-up activities (such as drafting proposals or discussing interim findings) are shifted to the online forums for a quicker turnaround.
- 2.4 Objective 1c: Explore the potential to have a student panel/steering group to participate in our research activities. To engage the wider student community, non-portfolio places should be included on the panel to inspire fresh ideas.
- 2.5 Objective 1d: Ensure research topics are meaningful for students and engage the wider student community. Actions under this objective include identification of 'hot topics' that are being researched at other student unions, collaborating with OU staff, and providing a space to explore Nation-specific topics with Area Association Representatives.
- 2.6 Objective 1e: Identify the most effective way of inviting ideas for research from the wider student community, exploring social media and an 'online suggestions box' (the latter could be tied-in with similar 'student ideas' projects at the Association). Trial focus groups to discuss potential research topics.

3. Aim 2: *'To enable informed decision-making within the Association'*

- 3.1 Our research work supports different arms of the Association's work, thus dealing with a variety of topics. The October 2018 workshop invited examples of the kinds of topics that CEC members would like to explore, leading to the identification of three categories of research topics. Under this aim, we will work towards achieving a balance of topics under these categories:
- 3.2 Objective 2a: The work of the Association and the needs of our student membership; potential topics include Association elections and student engagement with the Association.
- 3.3 Objective 2b: Study experience and engagement with the OU; potential topics include a refresh of our module selection/module delivery research and how student representatives work with various support services.
- 3.4 Objective 2c: Topics that touch on changes within the OU as well as ongoing conversations within the wider HE sector; potential topics include exploring the increase in the number of young students studying with the OU and attainment gaps (Black and Minority Ethnic and disabled students).

4. Aim 3: *'To enable our student volunteers to represent OU students at the university and national levels'*

- 4.1 Under this aim we will enable our student volunteers to engage with research in a meaningful way and encourage dialogue between student volunteers and the wider student community.

- 4.2 Objective 3a: Identify the mechanisms through which we engage a diverse audience, including current students, hard-to-reach groups, government bodies and decision-makers. This would further offer opportunities to give voice to part-time and distance learners' experience.
- 4.3 Objective 3b: Identify ways to better support the work of student volunteers, signposting them to information and research evidence in a timely way.
- 4.4 Objective 3c: Tie research activities with other Association events (such as Conference and Freshers) and OU events (such as student consultation events).
- 4.5 Objective 3d: Refresh the Student Research Forum available on the VLE to enable time-bound discussions taking place at regular intervals and invite student views on specific topics/research findings.
- 5. ***Aim 4: 'To partner with other organisation in the HE sector to build on our insights into the part-time and distance-learning student experience'***
- 5.1 We believe that in articulating the voice of part-time and distance learners, we have an opportunity to share our work and practices with the wider Higher Education (HE) sector, and under this aim we will:
- 5.2 Objective 4a: Identify specific topics where exchanging ideas and practice with the wider sector could help us gain further insight into part-time and distance learners' experience.
- 5.3 Objective 4b: Continue to share our research work at conferences and similar events organised within the HE sector.
- 6. ***Aim 5: 'To engage the student community in our research work and disseminate research findings in fresh and innovative ways'***
- 6.1 Highlighting the relevance of research to the wider student community, using a variety of formats and providing opportunities for students to participate in research is a key aim, under which we will:
- 6.2 Objective 5a: Develop the Student Voice Researcher role further, building on our experience so far and exploring the potential for 'micro-volunteering' within this role.
- 6.3 Objective 5b: Invite students participating in research activities to share their experience through blogs and the OU Students Magazine.
- 6.4 Objective 5c: Use different formats such as videos and podcasts to raise awareness of research work, and include shorter summaries highlighting the main findings of research reports.
- 6.5 Objective 5d: Maintain research presence at events such as the Association's Conference, while launching new events such as the Research Symposium scheduled for March 2019.

7. Updates on the Research Strategy

- 7.1 It is recommended that an annual update on the Research Strategy be presented to the CEC, detailing the activities that we have undertaken to progress these objectives. The October 2019 CEC meeting is suggested as a potential start date for these annual updates.

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