

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION**Central Executive Committee (CEC)**

22 – 24 January 2021

RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **comment** on the draft revised Relationship Agreement
- ii) **endorse** the revised Relationship Agreement for approval by the Board of Trustees
- iii) **note** the next steps

1. Background

- 1.1 The Relationship Agreement between the Open University and the Open University Students Association fulfils the requirement under Section 22 of the Education Act 1994 for a 'code of practice' between the institution and the student union. It details the duties and obligations of each organisation to the other and crucially sets out how we aim to work in partnership to improve the student experience.
- 1.2 The Relationship Agreement is currently subject to an annual review, where the partnership from each partner review the document and ensure that it is fit for purpose and captures the necessary details. The lead for the Students Association is the President and the lead for the University is the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students). This is the sixth such annual review since the document was first drafted and introduced.
- 1.3 The revised Relationship Agreement must be approved by the Association's Board of Trustees and by the University's Council.
- 1.4 This year's review has been conducted by the PVC (Students) team on behalf of the University together with the President and Chief Executive on behalf of the Students Association. This has included consultation on previous versions of this draft. The PVC (Students) team have shared this with University units and sought and sifted their feedback. We are grateful for the feedback provided by a number of CEC members on the draft revisions which we provided to the final review meeting in December. The version presented here

has been approved by the President and by PVC (Students) as the final draft that they are putting forward for final approval.

2. Proposed revisions

- 2.1 The proposed changes to the text of the agreement are identified in the appendix using tracked changes. The reasons for the most significant changes are set out in the following paragraphs. Others not recorded here are generally for readability.
- 2.2 The section on paper sharing (section 2e, pages 6-7) has seen the most significant revision. In March 2020 at the last annual review, the President and Council Member expressed their desire (and that of the Association) to expand the numbers of student representatives who can share confidential papers with each other as part of performing their roles as Central Committee Representatives and CEC members. Long-standing volunteers will be aware that this has caused issues in recent years and the Association has been seeking improvements in this area for some time.
- 2.3 The re-wording of this section makes it seem much more extensive than the changes really are, but they are a step forward and offer greater clarity on the situation than was previously the case.
- 2.4 The objective here, shared by the University's PVC (Students), is to support student representatives to be as effective as possible and allow them to communicate matters of importance to each other. We have argued that this will enable the University to better benefit from their input, as our representatives will be able to be better briefed and informed and feel enabled to talk about important issues with other CCRs and CEC members.
- 2.5 Of course, there remains work to do on ensuring that student representatives have the appropriate access to information and papers from committees up and down the governance structure. But it is a small step as part of wider and ongoing efforts.
- 2.6 Another change to the Relationship Agreement is a commitment that this document will move to being reviewed every two years instead of annually (page 2). Annual review is considered to be too onerous for relatively marginal changes each year.
- 2.7 The introduction to the Relationship Agreement has been enhanced to include reference to work across 4 nations and beyond (page 1).
- 2.8 Updated quotes reflect the new values contained in the recently refreshed Student Charter (pages 3, 5 and 7).
- 2.9 Minor changes to reflect the development of shared services agreements between the University and Students Association, which is an ongoing piece of work (page 4).
- 2.10 The partnership commitments are areas we agree to work together on until the next review. This section has been updated to include reference to the current

Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing work to respond to this and plan for future recovery.

- 2.11 The other new priorities identified here are in relation to the student community and to joint work around equality, diversity and inclusion.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 CEC members are asked to comment on the proposed changes, with a view that at this stage any feedback will be taken on board to go forward into the next review unless it is something highly significant.
- 3.2 The CEC is otherwise asked to provide their endorsement for the revised Relationship Agreement to go forward to the Board of Trustees for approval. For the University, the Relationship Agreement will proceed on to Council for approval at their meeting on 23 February 2021.

Rob Avann
Chief Executive