

## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Central Executive Committee (CEC)

22 – 24 January 2021

### FRESHERS FORTNIGHT SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

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The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **note** this update about the Freshers Fortnight September/October 2020

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The 2020 October Freshers' Fortnight took place between 28th September and 10th October 2020. After the resounding success of delivering the 2020 OU Students Association Conference entirely online, we knew we had really big shoes to fill.

#### 2. Planning

- 2.1 The planning of the Freshers' Fortnight was a real team effort. VP Community and the Community Team staff looked at all the components of the event, from putting together a schedule of events, setting up a comms plan, contacting all the possible hosts, training the hosts, supporting events, populating the microsite, setting up and holding competitions, setting up the mechanism for mailing list subscriptions, providing prizes for the competitions.

#### 3. Sessions

- 3.1 Given that the October 2020 Freshers' Fortnight was not going to have the benefit of having face-to-face sessions, everything had to happen online. We had 40 events, a wide variety of sessions, from the "Welcome to the OU Students Association" and "Making the most of your OU Tutor". Through to "Speed Friending" and the "Friday Night Quiz".

- 3.2 The top 5 most attended sessions were:

- Welcome to the OU Students Association – 197 participants
- Societies and Clubs Fair – 148 participants
- Friday Night Quiz – 134 participants
- Making the most of your OU Tutor – 133 participants
- Meet your student reps – 132 participants

#### **4. National and Faculty Sessions**

- 4.1 In September/October, some of the Area Association Reps and Faculty Association Reps posts were vacant. Despite this, sessions for all nations and all faculties were held, with student volunteers lending us a hand in hosting these events.

#### **5. Clubs and Societies**

- 5.1 There was a very well attended Societies and Clubs Fair hosted by Nigel Patterson, the Chair of Societies Committee, where we had in attendance representatives from a good number of our clubs and societies. They had three minutes to say a few words about their club or society, what they offer, how they can help students, and the benefits of being a member. The Fair and Freshers as a whole boosted engagement for a number of Societies and Clubs, for example Write Club gained 78 new members. The Space Science Club also gained 100 new members since their first events as a Club in Autumn 2020, and the rise can be partly attributed to the Fair and their own Freshers session which was very popular.

#### **6. Groups**

- 6.1 The Disabled Students Group held a Drop-In, and OU Pride (formerly known as Plexus) had an online quiz.

#### **7. OU sessions**

- 7.1 After the success of the online OU Expo at Conference in June 2020, we had a great response from the OU staff we contacted with regards to holding an event. As a consequence, we managed to have sessions with the Library, Careers Service, Open & Access Team. We had feedback from a member of staff who held the Open & Access session that it went well and the questions from students were excellent!

#### **8. Communications and Competitions**

- 8.1 In our monthly newsletter in September 2020, the Freshers microsite received the highest amount of clicks from the newsletters this year at 586.
- 8.2 The Freshers page on oustudents.com was the top viewed page in September 2020 with 26,554 views.
- 8.3 Top post on the Association's Facebook page in September 2020 was the Freshers Study Helper Competition – which reached 7,908 people, had 81 reactions, comments & shares and 513 post clicks.
- 8.4 Top post on the Association's Facebook page in October 2020 was the Freshers Academic Resolutions Competition – which reached 14,958 people, had 606 reactions, comments & shares and 1,776 post clicks.
- 8.5 Top post on the Association's Twitter page in September 2020 was the launch of the Freshers microsite and programme – which received 12,865 impressions, 115 retweets & likes, and 153 link clicks to the Freshers microsite.

- 8.6 Top post on the Association's Twitter page in October 2020 was the Freshers Academic Resolutions Competition – which had 17,455 impressions, 60 comments, 59 retweets & likes, and 77 clicks to the T&Cs.

## 9. What we learned

- 9.1 We had great feedback from students who enjoyed Freshers Fortnight very much. Here is a quote from an email from Sophie, who gave us permission to use this text:

*'I just wanted to say thank you so much for this week. This is my third university experience. The first time I attended a brick uni, the second distance learning and now I'm with the OU. But this has been the most included I have ever felt and I honestly thought that I wouldn't really have any contact with anyone. I've been to activities every day this week and I am currently in the Coffee and Chat session and it's been so nice to meet everyone. I've signed up to some Facebook groups and submitted some steps to the OU Fit challenge. It's just been so social and so much fun - really unexpected for a distance learning course. There is so much going on 😊 Thank you so much, this has given me such a boost. Can't wait until next week for Freshers part 2!!!'*

- 9.2 We are planning to do a full evaluation of both September/October 2020 and January/February 2021 Freshers Fortnights in Spring 2021, with the view to present a paper at the April CEC.

## 10. Room for improvement – initial feedback

- 10.1 We were very keen to hear the feedback on what we didn't do very well. Here is a snapshot of the comments received. We are looking at implementing these suggestions for the January/February 2021 Freshers Fortnight.
- a) The timetable for the Freshers Fortnight should be more prominent on the Freshers' website and requiring less clicks to get to it.
  - b) The Societies and Clubs event duration to be increased, as one hour was not enough to have meaningful input from all the representatives and also allow time for questions and answers at the end.
  - c) Adobe Connect is not the best medium if we are expecting a big number of students; we had more success in general with sessions on Microsoft Teams.
  - d) The most popular sessions took place in the evening.
  - e) If we have sessions running one after the other, it would help if we shorten them to 55 minutes, so there is a break to allow students to attend both, and also have time to make a cuppa!

## 11. Next steps

- 11.1 The next Freshers Fortnight will take place between 25<sup>th</sup> January and 6<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

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