

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)

22 – 24 January 2021

STUDENT VOICE WEEK 2020

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **receive** for information this report on Student Voice Week 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Student Voice Week (SVW) took place from 15th to 21st November 2020.
- 1.2 As in previous years, this was a partnership activity between the Students Association and the University – not just in the organisation of the week overall, but also in some of the individual events on offer, which were often co-created with students or student-led.
- 1.3 SVW was created and planned via a SVW Planning Group comprising student representatives, Students Association members of staff, members of the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Students and members of several University Units including faculties and Nations offices. The Planning Group was chaired by Fanni Zombor, VP Engagement.
- 1.4 The main aims and objectives for SVW were developed by the Planning Group and were:
 - To raise awareness of Student Voice amongst students.
 - To get more, and more diverse, students involved in Student Voice activities.
 - To raise awareness of Student Voice amongst staff.
 - To encourage staff to develop new initiatives for involving students in their work.
- 1.5 Through a series of University wide communications, including a ‘drop-in’ session promoted on OU Life, University staff were encouraged to formulate ideas and proposals for sessions and submit these via the Planning Group.

- 1.6 The week was promoted on Association and University online platforms, by email and through social media. Pre-registration was encouraged across most events to enable attendee number planning and subsequent evaluation.
- 1.7 A feedback survey was developed which all event attendees were encouraged to complete.

2. SVW Programme Overview

- 2.1 There were two main components to the Programme:
 - A day-long conference of staff-facing events on Wednesday 18th November, designed to raise awareness of Student Voice amongst University staff, share best practice and encourage staff to develop new student engagement initiatives.
 - A week-long programme of student and student/staff facing events running from the evening of Sunday 15th November through to the evening of Saturday 21st November, designed to raise awareness of Student Voice and to increase Student Voice engagement and reach.
- 2.2 During the week, over 40 online activities and events were organised by more than 15 teams across the OU and Students Association.
- 2.3 The day-long staff conference was attended by over 100 University staff over the course of the day. External speakers were welcomed from Wonkhe, QAA, Winchester and Durham and there were hosted panel sessions on impact and partnership as well as six workshops covering topics including involving students in Curriculum Design and the intersection between Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Student Voice.
- 2.4 The week-long student programme ranged from virtual cuppas to workshops and consultations. Over 1,000 students registered for activities during the week, and more than 500 students attended events. Sessions included engaging students as partners in scholarship and a wide range of topics including decolonising the curriculum, studying under lockdown and meeting the Student Support Chat Bot.
- 2.5 There was a very lively Q&A for students with colleagues from the Vice-Chancellor's Executive, hosted by Sarah Jones, President, with a wide range of questions submitted by students – dominated by the pandemic response but also covering issues such as research, IT infrastructure, Library access, learning materials and careers support.

3. Association Events

- 3.1 A number of events were organised and run by the Association, and student representatives also contributed to University events and panel discussions. Highlights from a few of these events are detailed below.
- 3.2 **Session: What is student voice: How can you get involved?**
20 students attended this session which opened the week on the evening of Sunday 15th November. This session offered attendees an overview of our

Academic Representation work and highlighted how they could engage with the OU's academic governance structure as student representatives.

The feedback received through the end-of-session survey was very positive: of the 8 respondents, 7 gave the session a rating of 5 and 1 gave it a rating of 4. Based on attending this session, 6 students selected 'yes' in response to the question "*are you likely to get involved with Student Voice activities in future*", while 2 selected 'maybe/not sure'. Furthermore, 7 selected 'agree' and 1 selected 'strongly agree' in response to the question "*do you think the OU values students' views and opinions, and working with students, to improve the student experience*".

Four of the session attendees also contacted the Association following the session to apply for volunteering roles.

3.3 **Session: Consultation on the Association's Student Community: With students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds**

Nine students attended this session which offered attendees an overview of different groups and activities hosted by the Students Association that they could participate in during their OU journey. This consultation was focused around getting feedback on the specific issues that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students might face when engaging with the student community, and how the Association could encourage and support them to participate. The feedback included themes such as ensuring that online spaces such as forums are safe and being able to see BAME representation within Association spaces/events.

3.4 **Session: Evaluating the impact of Student Voice (Workshop)**

This workshop was part of the one-day staff-facing *Student Voice: Making an Impact* conference which involved several student representatives across the panels and workshops. Matt Porterfield, VP Administration and the Association's Research and Information Officer joined the panel, and spoke about the need for evaluation practices to build in strategies for effective communication with the wider student body. We highlighted the role that student representatives, particularly the Central Committee Representatives, play in taking the student voice forward, and how we evaluate this work with initiatives such as the Representation Review conducted in 2019.

3.5 **Session: Students Association Strategy: Shared Goals and Partnership Working**

Sarah Jones, President and the Association's Policy and Public Affairs Manager presented a joint session with Julia Levitt-Faid from PVC-S, where Julia introduced the Student Charter and the Association introduced their strategy to an all-staff group from the OU in Wales.

An overview of the strategy was presented before focussing on opportunities in the nations and examples of the work we are already doing in Wales. There was a high level of engagement for the OUiW staff, with lots of suggestions for how we might collaborate in different areas moving forward and a number of further meetings have been set up to discuss some of these opportunities over the next few weeks.

3.6 **Session: SVW 2020: Student Partnership, Voice and Volunteering in Wales**

Eleven students attended this session where members of the Wales Student Volunteer Panel, supported by Alayla Castle-Herbert (OUiW) and the Association's Policy and Public Affairs Manager gave a presentation on what the Volunteer Panel is, how it works and who they are.

3.7 **Session: Studying under lockdown consultation**

Thirteen students attended this session co-hosted by Sarah Jones (President), Patrice Belton (VP Equality & Diversity) and Gareth Jones (FBL Faculty Representative). The consultation invited student feedback around how they had approached their OU study in 2020 and how the Association could support them better. The feedback touched on how students approach online communities, the kind of resources they might find useful (such as study support videos), and the study tips that they would share with fellow students.

4. **Evaluation**

4.1 A full evaluation of the week is still being completed, including a diversity analysis, but initial highlights are included below.

4.2 Tens of thousands of students were reached with news of the week via email, social media and online platforms including StudentHome and the Association's website, helping to convey the value and importance of Student Voice and lay the foundations for further increasing engagement and reach.

4.3 Over 120 submissions were received from the student survey and the top-line results show:

- 91% of students rated the session they participated in between 4 and 5 out of 5.
- 97% of students answered "Agree or Strongly Agree" to the question *"do you think the OU values students' views and opinions, and working with students, to improve the student experience?"* The majority of students (54%) answered "Strongly Agree".
- 88% of students said "yes" to the question *"are you likely to get involved with Student Voice activities in future?"*
- All students said either "yes" or "maybe/not sure" to the question *"are you likely to get involved with Student Voice activities in future?"*

4.4 A few student quotes from the free text box for any comments are included below.

- "I would like to get more involved and will look into how I can."
- "I got some very useful advice and learnt helpful things I didn't know about before, such as use links inside the qualification website that help when choosing to study more than 1 module. Thank you"
- "Very interesting and insightful session. Great to hear directly from senior academics in the faculty."
- "Excellent!"
- "Really interesting and informative session. Inspired me to get more involved with student voice"
- "Really enjoying all the sessions that I have participated in for student voice week so far"

- “I thoroughly enjoyed student voice week.”
- “I really enjoyed every session I attended. Well done to the organisers and all the speakers. It was great!”
- “I just had so much fun, and I made new friends, which I love. I would absolutely love to join in further”

5. Follow-up

- 5.1 A full evaluation and next steps will be considered by the Student Voice Steering Group, co-chaired by the President and attended by the Deputy President, VP Education and VP Engagement on 25 January.
- 5.2 Initial post-event recommendations from the SVW Planning Group include the following:
- There should be another Student Voice Week at a similar time in 2021, scheduled plenty of time in advance (from early 2021) to maximise participation.
 - Consideration should be given to ways in which the event can be as flexible and balanced as possible in different ways to engage with a variety of units – for example there were a disproportionate number of events organised by FBL in relation to other faculties – this should largely take the form of levelling up rather than restricting engagement.
 - While there was some feedback from students that they would like the event stretched over a longer period, this is unlikely to be taken forward as it would dilute the impact. It should, however, be made clear that Student Voice Week is not the only time that units should be thinking about Student Voice activities.
 - The Q&A with VCE members was well-received and could be repeated in the spring, possibly themed.
- 5.3 Workshops at the *Student Voice: Making an Impact* staff-facing conference were designed to contribute to ongoing work as part of the Student Voice Action Plan. Feedback from the workshops will contribute to the work of the Institutional Framework for Student Voice Task and Finish Group, chaired by the VP Education, which is developing guidance and best practice examples for staff in a series of Student Voice areas, including evaluation, curriculum design and involving students in meetings.

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