

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

OUSTUDENTS.COM

December 2020

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1. Introduction

The Open University Students Association (the "Association") is requesting proposals for the redesign, build, implementation and hosting of its website www.oustudents.com. The deadline for submissions is Thursday 11 February.

Our website needs to provide our core users (Open University distancelearning students) with a one-stop shop of services and opportunities to get involved in and enhance their study experience. The website requires a userfriendly design, supported by a robust and intuitive content management system (CMS).

Target Audience

Primarily, we are serving the following visitors to our website:

- Current OU students
 - looking to find out what the Association is and what it can offer (support services and representation for student voices)
 - o students searching for student discounts
 - students hoping to volunteer
 - students hoping to engage in community activities (social events, competitions, societies and clubs)
 - students hoping to join one of our support groups (LGBT+, Disabled Students and BAME students)
 - o current volunteers in a wide range of roles
 - student volunteers who are involved in our governance sitting in our Central Executive Committee and on our Board of Trustees (which also includes several external non-student Trustees)

The student demographic at The Open University is getting younger each year. On average of a new OU student is now in their twenties. This average age has dropped since 2012 when the average student was in their forties. Our students' needs are changing and we are evolving our offering to support them better.

We are also visited by Open University staff who want to learn more about how the Association is run and what it can offer students.

The main website is underpinned by a database of registered users who want to interact with the Association in different ways. As registered users, they can join one of our Support Groups, complete specific webforms and apply for volunteer roles. The user journey of volunteers is managed by the area of the CMS we refer to as the Volunteer Management System (VMS).

As our procedures have evolved and we would value an increased level of autonomy to adapt the VMS database so that we can add additional fields and role types to our volunteers' profiles as new roles and needs for queries/reports arise. We would welcome proposals which include the VMS as well as proposals which propose building a website which would interact with an external VMS.

We also have an external ecommerce site which requires users to input a different username and password to the main site. Ideally these two sites would be linked to improve the user experience. The requirements for the ecommerce site are not currently known, but this is a possible off-shoot project for a provider who is able to deliver the main website outlined in this document. More information about this can be found in Appendix 1.

2. Background to organisation

The Open University Students Association ("Association") was established by the University Charter and is an independent registered charity (number 1183837 and SC049546) and company limited by guarantee (number 12031028). We are a student union within the definition of the Education Act 1994, but we are unique in the sector.

- ✓ Over 170,000 total students, the largest University in the UK and one of the largest in Europe.
- ✓ The majority of students are studying part-time and at distance across the 4 Nations of the UK and in continental Europe. There are OU students in 90% of UK postal districts.
- ✓ Over 24,000 disabled students the largest single community of disabled students in Europe.
- ✓ 3 in 4 OU students are in work
- ✓ Over 1,700 students are currently studying in prison and other secure environments
- ✓ For most courses, no previous qualifications are required to study, removing some of the barriers to higher education.

We are an organisation for students, run by students, operating through a democratic structure. The Trustees and student representatives are supported by a team of 33 professional staff led by our Chief Executive and based on the Open University's campus in Milton Keynes.

Our charitable objects

The Association's objects are the advancement of education of Students at the Open University for the public benefit by:

- Defending the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances;
- Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the Open University during their period of study and representing and supporting students;
- Being the recognised representative channel between students and the Open University and any other external bodies;
- Asserting that all students studying with the Open University have the right to have their views heard and acknowledged by the University; and

• Providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its Students.

We also sell branded merchandise via a webstore and have a grant-giving trust (Open University Students Educational Trust, OUSET) which supports students in financial hardship to continue and complete their studies.

3. Proposal Timeline

The anticipated selection process is as follows:

ACTION	Date		
RFP Issued	Monday 21 December 2020		
Due date for questions	Monday 18 January 2021		
Submission Deadline for	Thursday 11 February 2021		
Proposals			
Evaluation of proposals and	w/c 15 February 2021		
invitations to shortlisted Providers to			
online demonstrations/presentations			
Demonstrations and presentations	24 & 25 February 2021		
from Providers			
Intent to award date	w/c 8 March 2021		
Anticipated kick-off date	Monday 12 April 2021		
Anticipated Go Live	Monday 12 July 2021		

Format of demonstrations and presentation sessions

These will be carried out online due to COVID restrictions. There will be an Association panel and we'd expect no more than 3 members of staff from your organisation to "attend". The panel will have questions for the presenters. We expect presentations to cover the details laid out in the provider's proposal, as well as any relevant supporting information. We would like to see examples from the provider's portfolio of the front and back-end of websites they have created. We would also like to hear details of how the project would be managed from the provider's perspective (e.g. project route map).

Questions

If you have questions regarding this RFP, you must submit them in writing by email to Kate Dungate at <u>kate.dungate@open.ac.uk</u> no later than 18 January 2021.

Answers will be sent to the provider asking the specific question. We will not seek to share these written answers with other providers (who have not asked the same or similar question) unless we deem it pertinent to the process to do so (for example, an omission or error etc).

• The deadline for submissions in response to this Request for Proposal is midday on Thursday 11 February 2021

4. Evaluation Factors for Award

Any award to be made pursuant to this RFP will be based upon the proposal with appropriate consideration given to operational, technical, cost, and organisational requirements. Evaluation of offers will be based upon the provider's responsiveness to the RFP and the total tiered prices quoted for the key three options of capabilities to be covered by the RFP (1. Essential, Highly Desired and Existing Capabilities; 2. the Volunteer Management System and 3. the Ecommerce site).

Key factors which we expect to evaluate proposals on:

- Ability to deliver in particular against "Essential elements" and replicate "Current Capabilities";
- Ability to deliver excellent standards of UK GDPR compliance and enable the Association to uphold these high standards in our workflow;
- Ability to ensure excellent standards of accessibility (WCAG 2.1);
- Ability to guarantee excellent customer experience (e.g. effective ticketing system for raising queries for resolving site problems and completing site build, a dedicated customer manager who will ensure queries are dealt with in good time);
- Competitively priced, offering value for money and clarity in terms of what is included in (and excluded from) the contract price.

5. Existing Capabilities of Main Website

Our current website is bespoke and also permits us as admin users to administer our volunteer application process. The following list gives you an overview of our current capabilities. We understand that other providers may be able to provide us with equivalent tools and services using alternative approaches. A potential new provider would at least need to match the capabilities of our existing site.

The functionalities solely related to our Volunteer Management System are marked with an asterisk*.

These items can also be queried in the spreadsheet provided.

Pages/Content

- 1. Ability to post news, events and volunteer roles (some are categorised as associated with Societies, or one of our three support groups)
- 2. Administration of homepage (selecting featured banners, editing navigation)

- 3. Webforms We are able to create webforms and have used this feature for various purposes including to run a ballot for tickets to a large-scale event.
- 4. Ability to create a limited number of page types for different aspects of our offering (Societies, Rep profile pages etc.)
- 5. Ability to build our own Microsites (with separate identities / branding)
- 6. Volunteer Zone Area of the website with volunteering resources, open to volunteers with upgraded permissions
- 7. Social stream displays Tweets from our account
- 8. Users can view videos
- 9. Users can download documents from the site

Processes

- 10. Registration for main site (including accepting privacy policy) and administration of user profiles (password change/permissions etc.)
- 11. Registered users can join one of our Support Groups
- 12. Registered users can apply for Volunteer roles. The application and acceptance process is managed through the back-end*
- 13. Exports (We're able to export data from webform submissions and database of volunteers*, group members and registered users)
- 14. Ability to add and activate new admin users

Additional Admin Capabilities

- 15. Ability to query user profiles and view what volunteer roles* and support groups an individual is associated with
- 16. We're able to edit our own privacy policy, meta description and create redirects
- 17. We're able to search for all references to user's profile on the site's database and retrieve, delete or anonymise their data across the entire system.

6. Project Overview

The current iteration of oustudents.com has evolved with the organisation. As we have grown we have become more aware of the capabilities we need. We

require a site with an easy to use and efficient back-end system and an easy to train search facility to ensure effective searching for pages by users. The site would have sufficient stability to cope with an influx of visitors twice a year as part of Freshers (1K+ visitors in a fortnight). This project will also include the migration of data from our current site.

Streamlining by bringing services in-house

We are currently reliant on a number of different external systems to provide students with our services (including MailChimp, Eventbrite and Microsoft Forms). We also have a separate e-commerce site which requires users to use a separate login. Our ambition is to streamline our offering to students and join up our systems in order to provide the best possible user experience.

Accessibility

Given the high proportion of disabled members amongst OU students and the time-poor lifestyle of students studying from a distance, it is essential that the website design and functionality both streamlines user interactions for improved user engagement and provides a highly accessible user experience. We are aiming to provide a website which adheres to WCAG 2.1. ¹

Design

Ensuring the organisation's digital outreach is essential to the running our organisation from a distance. In terms of aesthetic preferences, our new site would uphold our brand guidelines and ensure the Association is represented as dynamic, forward-thinking, but also very welcoming. Maintaining our individual style helps Open University students differentiate between the Association and The Open University. It is important that the website is visually pleasing, recognisable and the CMS provides flexibility so that our brand can continue to develop.

We would be happy to look to other student unions and volunteering sites for inspiration. Here are a few examples:

- <u>https://su.sheffield.ac.uk/</u>
- <u>https://www.bristolsu.org.uk/</u>

Volunteering search example: <u>https://do-it.org/</u>

Strategy microsite example: <u>https://su.sheffield.ac.uk/about/purpose-vision-values</u>

We expect the following work to be covered in-house or outsourced beyond the scope of this project: copywriting, graphic design and branding.

Data

The OU Students Association processes data from various sources. Users (who are predominantly OU students) register for oustudents.com and provide us with various data including their student identifier number and their email address. We are reliant on The Open University's separate database of students to verify student users on an individual basis when we are selecting them for volunteer roles or permitting them to join one of our three Support Groups. We are currently unable to run these two sources of data alongside one another in an automated way. Doing so would improve the accuracy of our data and would significantly increase our efficiency.

7. Technical Requirements

The scope of work for the main website is split into three categories: replicating the site's existing capabilities (see section 5 "Existing capabilities") and the following two lists of "Essential" and "Highly Desired" capabilities for the main website. These items can also be queried in the spreadsheet provided.

New "Essential" Capabilities for main website

Layout/User Experience

1. Responsive Web Design

Content Management System

- 2. Word-like Editor for text (WYSISWG)
- 3. Effective way of adding Metadata
- 4. Easily to train search facility
- 5. Effective website taxonomy / Site Map
- Intuitive system for managing pages/media content Effective Banner/Image Administration (including tagging, searching for and resizing)
- 7. Navigation Administration
- 8. Footer Administration
- 9. Browser based administration
- 10. Effective Site Search
- 11. Link Manager/Checker (to pinpoint broken links and help us resolve them)
- 12. Easy to upload videos and embed on pages

Database of registered users

- 13. Intuitive method for resolving user account queries (username/password/permissions for restricted area)
- 14. Easy process for reporting from database on number of Group members for admin users
- 15. Staff admins being able to report on the number of users which are members of groups directly from the user database
- 16. The system would allow us to add additional data fields which we can query and report on/export data on as our processes evolve

Directories/Search

- 17. Easy upload functionality which displays documents in an accessible way
- 18. The ability to upload PDFs in bulk to add to a page displaying papers associated with a meeting (c.20-30)
- 19. An effective system to help users search for and find relevant volunteer roles for them (e.g. using filtering/keywords)²

News

- 20. News feeds associated with different categories
- 21. Social sharing buttons

Events Display

- 22. Events calendar with multiple views (monthly overview/ listings)
- 23. Filters on displayed events by theme and date
- 24. Expiration of events on calendar (so they don't need to be manually removed)
- 25. Upcoming events are displayed on the homepage

Microsites

26. Separate microsite for our sister organisation, the OU Students Educational Trust (with separate Privacy Policy)

Webforms

27. Programmable contact us form which directs user to appropriate contact/mailbox without displaying their email address (with measures in place to avoid spamming)

GDPR

28. A UK GDPR compliant site (which allows us to uphold the individual rights of the user)

- 29. Ability to collect and store the preferences of users defined as students in terms of communications and use this data to exclude some users from future email communications.
- 30. Mechanism for upholding a retention policy for deleting profiles after a certain number of years after initial registration.

New "Highly Desired" Capabilities for main website

The features below are not essential requirements for the Association's website at this time, but the Association is interested in these capabilities. They are Priority 2 items. Please include information and availability of the items in the proposal now or for integration in the future.

Events Display

- 31. Ability to add a listed event to your calendar
- 32. Ticketing functionality so that paid event types can be an option
- 33. Pre-registration for prospective event attendees: Automated/Semiautomated emails sent out (much like Eventbrite) so that attendees are reminded of event, sent a link to an online event and we have a record of who we expect to attend
- 34. Ability for volunteers to access and book onto training events (which are only visible to volunteers)

Content Management System

- 35. Being able to categorise/tag content from various content types so that it automatically displays as 'related content', particularly on desktop (If you're reading this article you may also be interested in this person's bio/volunteer role/society etc.)
- 36. Easy uploads to image library (drag and drop)
- 37. Readability checker
- 38. Ability to preview pages before publishing
- 39. Ability to occasionally upload print-quality content that students can print at home
- 40. Portable alt-text associated with individual images
- 41. The last editor of a page is displayed
- 42. The creator of a page is displayed
- 43. Ability to display randomised content within a content type on the homepage (e.g. a different volunteer bio appears each time you visit the site)
- 44. Layout administration with multiple layouts to choose from
- 45. The ability to easily embed video on various page types
- 46. Ability to send emails to registered users including various subsets of users
- 47. Ability to manage of Newsletter subscription (currently on Mailchimp) in a more effective and integrated way
- 48. Ability to adjust the admin rights of individual staff members

Interactive features

- 49. Mechanism for us to evaluate the effectiveness of specific pages (e.g. feedback buttons)
- 50. Ability to run petitions and polls
- 51. Diagnostic quiz
- 52. Signposting to article submissions on our WordPress site (<u>https://thehootstudents.com/</u>) – Teasers created in a semi-automated way

Webforms

- 53. Tailored contact forms for different pages and the ability to administrate them through the CMS
- 54. The option to be able to cap the number of webform submissions for a given form
- 55. A deduplication functionality to help us easily deal with users who submit multiple webforms, when only one is allowed (e.g. for a competition)
- 56. Improved complaint submission system

Database of registered users

57. Non-staff admins able to easily look up how many members of our individual three support groups there are.

Directories/Search

- 58. An intuitive mechanism for students to find the profile of the student volunteer associated with their course.
- 59. A number of additional search directories for pages within a particular category (e.g. committee papers, research documents, support pages and help)

Elections

60. We would like to be able to administer elections for our various Societies and Support Groups

Microsites

- 61. Additional tailored microsites: Societies zone microsite (for society members) and Strategy microsite (displays description and status of the projects we're working on)
- 62. Peer Supporters zone (a resource area for anonymous student volunteers with enhanced permissions)

Support Group features

63. Automated email sent to each new Group Member on registration

- 64. Streamlined acceptance/rejection process including semi-automated email
- 65. The ability to view a list of group members and email them directly from the back-end
- 66. Allowing Heads of Committees for Groups (specific volunteers with enhanced permissions) to email their membership without having access to the rest of the website's database of users

Surveys

67. A survey functionality which allows us to export data more effectively

Tailored user experience

- 68. Personalised experience for users once they have logged into website
- 69. Find for your Faculty Rep feature students enter their field of study/course code

Miscellaneous

- 70. Solution for displaying infographics while maintaining accessibility
- 71. We would like to explore the option of adding adverts

72. Verifying that users are Open University students

Ideally, we would like to be able to verify student users when they register for the site by comparing the details they enter into the site against The Open University's external database of students. The Open University owns the student data and shares it with us for specific purposes set out in a Data Sharing Agreement.

If integration with Open University systems isn't possible it would still be valuable if we could have a built-in validation mechanism for assessing whether the student identifier a user is registering with is accurate/fits the standard format (combination of numbers and letters).

73. Managing student opt-outs

All Open University students have the right to opt out of membership of the Association. When a student completes our opt-out form on oustudents.com, we need a means of accurately identifying the correct student record to flag this person's profile as 'opted out'. This data then needs to be communicated to The Open University's external student database so that they can ensure these students no longer receive emails regarding the Association.

74. Peer Support Service

Peer Support is a written contact service for students who need a boost with their study journey from fellow students. We would like to be able to host this on our website (as opposed to Facebook or OU forums). For example, through a chat box functionality which allows students to talk to designated volunteers (with specific permissions) via written text through the website (while both users maintain their anonymity). We would like to be able to switch this feature on and off, so that it is unavailable at certain times of day. Ideally it would record the written interaction, and admin users with specific permissions would be able to access this log. Ideally multiple peer supporters would be able to chat with users simultaneously and users would be able to leave feedback once the interaction had taken place.

8. New Volunteer Management System (VMS) Capabilities

Our current website is underpinned by a database of registered users, some of whom are also past/present volunteers. This data would need to be migrated to a new system **or** a solution would need to be delivered to integrate an external Volunteer Management System with the main website.

As mentioned in "5. Existing Capabilities" section of this document, our current set up on oustudents.com allows us to administer the volunteer application process, tag users as volunteers and upgrade their permissions so that they can access our 'Volunteer Zone' pages.

New "Essential" Capabilities for Volunteer Management System

- 1. Being able to export all information from volunteer application forms in an effective format
- 2. Being able to easily edit and delete data
- 3. The system would allow us to add additional data fields for volunteer profiles which we can query and report on/export data on as our processes evolve
- 4. Ability to record the details of communications (email/call/f2f) with an applicant/prospective volunteers (much like a CRM system)
- 5. Ability to set role start/finish date
- 6. Ability to hold role description and application details for a role with start and end date for that recruitment
- 7. Ability to easily tag individuals with volunteer roles
- 8. Ability to edit volunteer contact details
- 9. Ability to record when a volunteer has completed training for a role
- 10. Ability to record correspondence email address for a student
- 11. Easy to send group or individual emails to volunteers from inside the database
- 12. Volunteer application process is easy, user friendly and accessible for user
- 13. Ability to download all volunteer details for volunteers in a role

- 14. A GDPR compliant system
- 15. The right to restrict processing; right to data portability; right to object; rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling.
- 16. Mechanism for upholding a retention policy for deleting profiles after a certain number of years after initial registration.
- 17. Ability to set pseudonyms for a number of anonymous volunteers and then search for these easily.

New "Highly Desired" Capabilities for Volunteer Management System

- 18. Ideally the Volunteer Management System would be able to interface with the OU's master database of students' details (including their study status and contact details).
- 19. Ability for volunteers to earn badges/track hours
- 20. Ability to automatically log date/time of updates to data by a user of the system
- 21. Easy to export volunteer application forms to MS Word

9. Proposal Details

A proposal must include the following elements to be accepted by the Association:

- Letter of Interest/Executive Summary (not to exceed 2 pages)
 - Overview of how your company will approach the project
 - Statement of guaranteed hosting uptime
- Company Profile (not to exceed 3 pages)– to include
 - Company overview and history
 - Number of current employees
 - o Location of support and development staff
- Project Manager/Key Personnel
 - Names, Titles, and Roles
 - Years of experience
 - Information about any subcontractors that will be a part of the project and their role.
- Website experience (Ideally with a Charity / Association/ Student Union)
 - References (minimum of 3 including client name, website URL, Client contact person, email address).
 - Evidence of identifying creative and unique approaches to website design, for example user feedback, social media integration, etc
- Project Development Approach
 - Typical timeline/schedule
 - Process used to determine design needs³
 - Most important design issues to consider
 - Number and types of contact with the Association during the design and implementation phases
 - o Proposed approach to ensuring Accessibility of website

- Protocol for pre-acceptance testing
- Migration and Integration
 - o Typical approach to migrating data from previous database
 - If relevant, process for determining how Integration with external systems could work (Volunteer Management System and OU database of students)
- Hosting, Security and Data Protection
 - Uptime guaranteed (outside of scheduled maintenance)
 - o Bandwidth, Disaster Recovery, Security
 - Location of servers hosting the website and on which data will be stored (ideally in the UK)
 - Evidence of the provider's compliant approach to UK GDPR. As part of the contract we will require a Data Processing Agreement to be in place.
 - Details of technical and organisational measures in place to safeguard personal data.
- Training
 - Type and number of trainings included in the RFP cost⁴
- Support and Maintenance
 - Describe support services live support staff, hours, contact methods and standard resolution times
 - Availability of online training manuals and technical support
- Mobility
 - If the Association decides to switch providers in the future, describe how the transition process works.
 - Is there an ability for the Association to secure a backup copy of the files (pictures, CSS, layouts, SQL, coding)?
- Scope of the Work
 - An indication of what your proposal includes from the "Essential" and "Highly Desired" website capabilities listed.
 - Please use the numbering and/or follow the same terminology indicated where possible to allow us to assess proposals effectively

Proposed Fees

The provider may use the table provided or a format of their own choosing to represent their fees. Fees should include project components as listed below – if applicable.

Project Component	£	Notes
1. Website Development		
Development cost – web design services, implementation to include 'Essential' elements and replicating current capabilities (specified in this document and in attachment)		
Migration of content from existing site		
Training cost – days/hours and type of training		
Additional cost for delivering some or all 'Highly Desired' elements (to be specified in list)		
Cost for either a) Volunteer Management System or b) Integration with an external Volunteer Management System		Please specify which option
Estimate for E-commerce site (based on equivalent past projects), if applicable.		
TOTAL WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT COST		
2. Recurrent Costs		
Website hosting services		
Maintenance, Subscription, Support cost		
Upgrade costs		Are the future CMS upgrades included in the annual maintenance cost or paid additionally?
TOTAL RECURRENT COSTS		
3. Other Costs		
Additional Fees schedule – for specialty, outside scope or additional work – customised work/requests		
Any additional fees not listed above.		Please provide details

Appendix 1 – Our Ecommerce site

Our current site links out to an external e-commerce site – our Association webstore: <u>https://www.oustudentsshop.com/</u> Our ambition is to allow users to have one single login which allows them to access relevant activities on oustudents.com (applying for volunteer roles, joining support groups etc.) as well as purchase items from our webstore. The webstore also provides OU students with access to past exam papers that they can download free of charge.

The successful provider will either need to link with our existing webstore or provide a new webstore site. The details of the specification for a potential new webstore are not currently known in full. Any e-commerce site would have to integrate with external warehouse systems managed by The Open University. The current warehouse systems are under review and details of the successful provider will not be available until 2021. The e-commerce site would also need to integrate with Opayo, our secure payments provider, and will need to be compliant with the <u>PCI DSS regulations</u>.

Appendix 2 – More about the OU Students Association

We are headed by a President who together with the Deputy President and several Vice Presidents comprise the Association's Officers - all of whom are elected by their fellow students to serve a two-year term. In turn, those Officers lead our Central Executive Committee, which also includes students elected to represent 6 geographic areas and the 4 University faculties.

All elected and appointed student representatives, apart from the President and Deputy President, are unpaid volunteers who fulfil their roles alongside their study, work and life commitments. Most also operate at great distance from the Milton Keynes campus.

As a charitable company limited by guarantee, our governing document is our Articles of Association, supported by a set of bye-laws. Ultimate authority and responsibility for our activities is vested in the Board of Trustees, which features 9 elected students and 3 external Trustees, one from the latter category acting as the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

A Relationship Agreement between the Association and the Open University governs how we work in partnership and sets out the obligations of both parties. This document can be viewed on our website under '<u>How we are run</u>'.

Our strategy

The website review project is part of our communications strategy, that is part of our overall strategic plan. Our strategic plan focuses on three core objectives and our website needs to support the delivery of these:

- ✓ Inform and Support: we want to increase awareness of the Students Association and improve the relevance of our services.
- ✓ Engage and Involve: we want to increase student engagement and improve opportunities.
- Influence and Transform: we want to increase our influence and improve our impact.

Our organisational values are Integrity; Equality and Inclusivity; Openness; and Collaboration. More details of our new strategy can be viewed on our <u>website</u>.

The Staff Team

The staff team, which has until recently been solely based on The Open University campus in Milton Keynes, works closely with elected student representatives and other student volunteers in delivering our charitable and strategic objectives.

We currently employ 33 permanent members of staff across 10 teams. Please refer to the organisational chart attached to the email and to <u>our website</u> for more information. In 2019/20, we also worked with 562 volunteers performing a wide range of roles and commitments.

You can read much more about the Association, including our accounts and annual reports, on our website at <u>www.oustudents.com.</u>