

## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Central Executive Committee (CEC)

19 – 21 July 2019

### PEER SUPPORT SERVICE

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The CEC is asked to: -

- i) **receive** an update on the Peer Support Service

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Now seems an appropriate time for an update of the relaunched Peer Support Service. It was about this time last year that potential Peer Supporters were going through the application process, ready for the relaunch in September. We could only re-open the Service once they had completed various training sessions because there was only one experienced Supporter. The Feedback from Supporters about the training was very positive, so little will change during the next recruitment and training phase which opens in July. Students will continue to be supported during the process because there are continuing, experienced Supporters.

#### 2. Individual Requests, Not Duplicates

- 2.1 Peer Supporters have helped the following number of students between September 2018 and June 2019.
  - Email requests – 42
  - Forum requests – 39
  - One to ones – 15

#### 3. Application Process, Training and Current Status

- 3.1 Between September 2018 and June 2019 there were:
  - 35 students who applied to be Peer Supporters.
  - 29 received training on Adobe Connect and other selected training such as Safeguarding, Data Protection, Unconscious Bias, Prevent, and IT Security.
  - 9 DBS Checked (total number of Supporters in post when this was carried out)
  - 9 current supporters

#### **4. D B S (DBS) Checks (Disclosure and Barring Service)**

- 4.1 The DBS took longer than anticipated. Acting on advice received it was thought all Peer Supporters would have to be checked, which was expected to be free of charge and a fairly simple procedure. When looking further it was discovered that Peer Supporters did not need to be DBS checked because although vulnerable adults and under 18s might use the service our service is not set up just to cater for vulnerable adults and Under 18s. Legal Advice was sought and stated that DBS checks were not required for Peer Supporters so if the checks were carried out, they would not be free. However, it was felt that to ensure as safe a service as possible, our Peer Supporters should go through this procedure. The Board of Trustees was approached and agreed to fund these DBS checks.

#### **5. Equal Levels of Service**

- 5.1 Head of the Association's Student Support Team, Verity, has access to all the Supporters' individual mailboxes, where they provide one to one support; the generic Mailbox for one off queries; and the forum where students post their queries to Supporters. This ensures the levels of service students receive is as equal as possible and provides an extra protective layer for students and Peer Supporters.

#### **6. Feedback**

- 6.1 Peer Supporters have fed back about the training they received and also how they feel about aspects which affect how they operate. In general, this has been very positive but, where needed, adjustments have been made based on this feedback. One example is a more flexible rota system. A new feature of the relaunched Peer Support Service is to request feedback from students who have received one to one support. One reason for this was to see if we needed to make any changes to improve the service. I have permission to quote some of the students' feedback, it is wonderful to read their really positive comments.

- I am so pleased to have a Peer Supporter. She has made the difference between giving up and carrying on.
- I must say that the peer support I have received has been outstanding and extremely helpful. Not only do I get a speedy response but I also get notifications of 'away' times.
- It is great to have someone on the same journey with you.

- 6.2 These are similar to comments I've read on Facebook which are equally complimentary about the support given by our Peer Supporters.

#### **7. Fixed Term Introduced**

- 7.1 Until this year the Peer Supporter role did not have fixed terms and Supporters could continue until they resigned or ceased being a student. I did not intend to change this. However, this created a measure of unpredictability because once they stopped being an OU student, they ceased being a Supporter that day, even if they wanted to continue. It also disadvantaged Peer Supporters compared with other Association appointed and elected

representatives who can continue in their role until the end of their term. Introducing a fixed term means Supporters are in place until July 31<sup>st</sup> each year, irrespective of when they join or cease being a student. Providing Supporters are members of the Students Association on August 1<sup>st</sup> they can continue in post for another 12 months. A fixed term does not stop Supporters resigning during those 12 months. Every June PS Admin will know how many Supporters are continuing and will recruit and train new Supporters in July and August. However, if necessary this can also happen at other times of the year.

## **8. Increasing Our Supporter Numbers**

8.1 The great news is that the Application Process and Training will take place during July and August, because more Supporters are needed. There is more information about the process and the application forms [here](#)

8.2 **4<sup>th</sup> July** – Applications Open  
**22<sup>nd</sup> July** – Applications Close  
**30<sup>th</sup> or 31<sup>st</sup> July** – Training 6:30-8:30pm  
**July and August** - selected training (as per 2018) and DBS checking.

## **9. Future Plans**

9.1 Although our Peer Supporters have helped many students, there's still room for improvement of the service. This includes more advertising and targeting particular groups of students. One way of spreading the word is to speak about our Peer Support Service to student facing OU staff and improve how, when and where the service is advertised to students. Targeting particular groups of students includes, for example, ensuring we reach students who have recently been released from secure environments. We have plans for our Peer Supporters to receive additional training that will help them gain a better understanding of students who present with mental health difficulties.

**Alison Kingan**  
**Vice President Student Support**