

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

19 – 21 October 2018

WEBSITE USER TESTING PROJECT: USABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **receive** an update on a recent project in which the Learning and Teaching Innovation department conducted live student user testing on oustudents.com

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Oustudents.com has been live for just over one year and all teams have been adding content and resources for students. We identified the need for feedback from students on the usability and accessibility of the site to make improvements and assist future development. To achieve this we worked with experienced professional staff in the Learning and Teaching Innovation department to recruit students and conduct sessions in the Jennie Lee Labs. The report will be shared with the Central Executive Committee once available and will provide detailed, constructive feedback and recommendations. These will be used to help us plan version two of oustudents.com in a forthcoming staff and student workshop.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Open University Students Association launched a new website in September 2017 using an independent platform allowing more flexibility with branding, development and data collection. Before launching, the Association had a test site which staff and students were invited to give feedback. However, the site was in its early stages with limited content, and a need for further testing by new students with a fresh perspective was identified.
- 2.2 Since launching the website the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) have audited 15 pages on the website covering a cross-section of the site that included the key processes. The Royal National Institute of Blind People provided an audit report which was set out against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA accessibility principles, highlighting changes that needed to be made, which have since been acted on. A few

more complex changes are still being assessed and worked on by Gravit-e, but the vast majority of suggestions have been implemented.

- 2.3 The OU Students Association staff have been trained and upskilled in producing accessible content as well as being offered information and guidance on managing content on the oustudents.com website. During a visit to the OU's Global Accessibility Awareness Day workshop we were put in contact with Graham Healing of the Learning and Teaching Innovation department who is experienced at running professional usability and accessibility user testing sessions. This was the perfect fit for our needs and we arranged to run sessions led by Graham at the first opportunity in the purpose-built Jennie Lee Labs.

3. Details of testing

- 3.1 It is important that any OU student who visits the website has a straightforward and comfortable experience, but importantly finds what they are looking for and has the desire to return or get further involved in the Association. We felt it was important to focus on students who were fairly new to the Students Association and weren't familiar with oustudents.com or previous websites.

- 3.2 To ensure the website testing was carried out by a representative group of students, the research office at the OU contacted disabled students, non-disabled students, students of all ages and ethnicities, and students of any gender. A total of seven students were recruited and invited to the Milton Keynes Campus where they were given a series of tasks to complete within a 90-minute period. During this time the students were given the opportunity to freely navigate around the website, as well as being given a series of tasks to complete. The students were asked to browse the website as they would in their own environment whilst describing what they were doing and what they were trying to achieve. Whilst the students were completing the tasks and navigating the website, they were encouraged to tell us what they thought was happening and to suggest ideas for improvement and tell us what they liked about the site.

- 3.3 The type of tasks the students were asked to carry out:

- To explore the home page and the website to report on first impressions
- To search and browse the website, looking for NUS/Totum card, past papers, events, how to find documents etc.
- To create an account and report on the process. Was it easy/difficult? How could this process be improved?
- To look at volunteer roles and report on layout, amount of information and how to apply for a volunteer role.
- To look at audio visual content and to report on the information given before committing to watch or listen to something. Furthermore, to report on how easy or hard it is to navigate the podcast and video player applications.
- To visit the Disabled Students Group microsite and report on whether the student had heard of the group, their thoughts on the microsite and whether the student knew how to return to the Association website.
- To look at the student magazine and say whether they would prefer to read this information online or in paper form.

- To view the website as if it was on a mobile phone and report on how and/or why it feels different to visiting through a laptop or desktop PC.
- To summarise the session by reporting their overall thoughts, whether they would visit the Association website again, what they did and didn't like about the site and what they would change about the website. The students were also asked to declare what they would like the site to offer that it didn't already and what they thought the relationship was between the OU and the Students Association.

3.4 Whilst the website testing was taking place, several staff members from the OU and Students Association were able to observe from a different room via a video link. During all of the testing sessions a professional note taker was present to record the findings which allowed the staff to pay attention to the student's thoughts, feelings and reactions to the outstudents.com website. Students from the Central Executive Committee team were invited to observe the website testing sessions from the same room as the staff observers and note taker.

3.5 Although feedback was anecdotal, having seven students test the website allowed the Association staff to notice common themes with the website feedback. Overall, the feedback was positive and constructive and will drive the second phase of developing the outstudents.com website. There were some comments from students that were related to personal preference, which was also taken on board by Association staff. The report will make a number of recommendations for usability and accessibility improvements.

3.6 Whilst the students were on campus for the testing they received refreshments, a Student Association goodie bag and received a voucher as a gesture of thanks after the day.

4. Next steps

4.1 The Learning and Teaching Innovation department are in the process of compiling a report on the findings and recommendations for action. Once the report is available it will be uploaded to the Central Executive Committee forum for review.

4.2 The next stage is to use this constructive feedback to start planning future developments of outstudents.com. When the Association has received the report, discussions will focus on how to implement recommendations.

4.3 The user testing and the recommendations included in the report will provide an excellent base for these decisions and we look forward to continuing our relationship with the Learning and Teaching Innovation Department in the coming months as we seek to improve our online offering.

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