



## CONFERENCE 2018 EVALUATION REPORT

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### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The OU Students Association Conference is a biennial event offering students the opportunity to visit the Open University's campus in Milton Keynes, meet with fellow students, and learn more about the Association's work. Key activities include voting on various resolutions during the Business session and attending a variety of workshops and social events. The Online Conference offers students not able to attend the face-to-face component the opportunity to vote and engage online.
- 1.2 Conference 2018 was held during 22-24 June, organised by the staff team at the Association Office and advised by the student-led Conference Steering Group. The following key objectives were identified for the Conference this year:
- Excite and inspire students to get involved in a diverse range of Students Association initiatives
  - Raise awareness of different support and services available through the Students Association.
  - Make business more prominent and accessible for conference
  - Listen and Create: Ideas for student-led projects
- 1.3 Delegate feedback on different aspects of the Conference was invited through two surveys, sent to those students who attended Conference on the Milton Keynes Campus (Face-to-face Delegates) and those attending online (Digital Delegates). The evaluation presented in this report considers this feedback against the key objectives set for Conference 2018.

### 2. Conference Communications

- 2.1 Communications about Conference 2018 were designed to raise awareness of the event, generate interest in Conference Business, and share information about the Conference weekend with the Face-to-face and Digital Delegates. Similar to previous years, a number of communication channels were used, including email communications and social media engagement. Posts on social media about Conference 2018 received a combined reach of 26,345, thereby raising awareness both of the event and the Students Association.
- 2.2 This year, a 'mini' edition of the OU Students Magazine featured news stories about Conference Business and the Conference programme, receiving 2500 click-throughs. A promotional video featuring highlights from Conference 2016 reached 3,732 users and was viewed by 1,547 users. Live STUDIO shows, hosted by OU students and highlighting different Conference activities and

events, were made available through the Association's Facebook page and later published on the Association website.

- 2.3 In 2018, a Conference microsite hosted a number of resources, including separate pages for Face-to-face and Digital Delegates. Through the microsite, students could access the programme for the weekend, learn more about Conference Business, and watch the recording of the Students Association Conference Celebration event. Engagement with the Conference microsite was good, with 2,519 users visiting the microsite homepage 3,423 times between 1 May 2018 and the end of Conference.
- 2.4 Both the Face-to-face and Digital delegates were asked to indicate their satisfaction with the frequency of communications about Conference 2018 - 87% of Face-to-face delegates and 81% of Digital delegates were happy with the frequency of communications.
- 2.5 Chart 1 shows the different channels through which Face-to-face and Digital delegates heard about Conference 2018. The most popular channels were 'emails from the Students Association' (selected by 67% of Face-to-face delegates and 76% of Digital delegates) and 'the Students Association's website' (selected by 35% of Face-to-face delegates and 50% of Digital delegates). The OU Students' Magazine and 'word of mouth' were both selected by 17% of Face-to-face delegates, but fewer Digital delegates selected these options. Social media messages on Facebook and Twitter were more popular with Digital delegates.

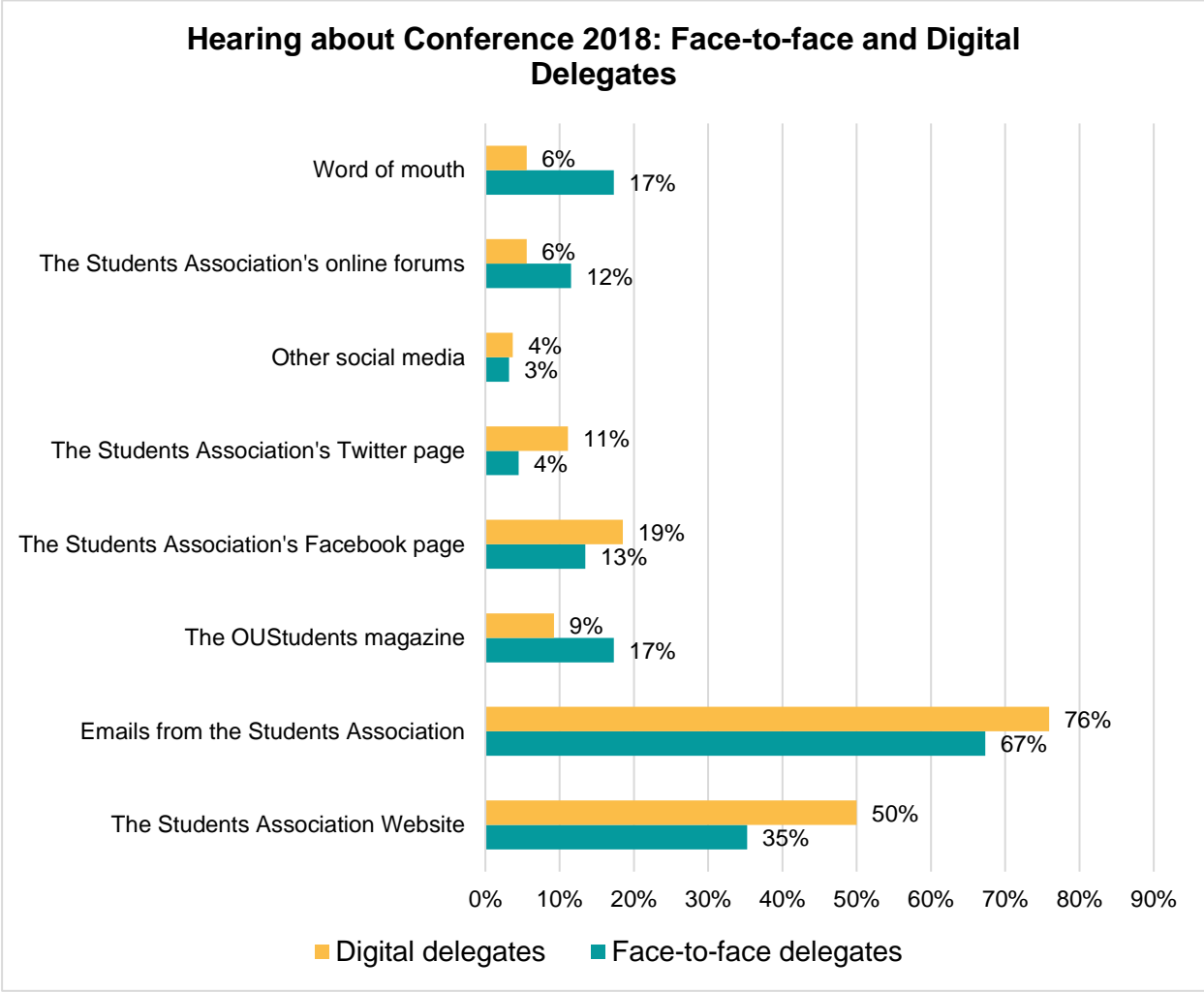


Chart 1. List of different communication channels through which the Face-to-face and Digital Delegates heard about Conference 2018.

### **3. Registration and Attendance**

- 3.1 In 2018, the registration process used a ballot system where students could register their interest in attending Conference. The regional allocation of places was discontinued, as was the 'first come first served' system. National allocation of places was introduced with a randomising software to allocate delegate places. In addition to the national allocation, places were also reserved for the outgoing and newly elected student leadership team, the Association's Honorary Life Members, committee members of affiliated Societies, the OU Students Association's LGBT+ Group PLEXUS and the Disabled Students Group (DSG).
- 3.2 Regarding the communications around registration, 69% of Face-to-face delegates and 80% of Digital Delegates found them to be 'very useful – just the right amount of information'. 27% of Face-to-face Delegates and 13% of Digital Delegates found them to be 'fairly useful - the information provided could have been more detailed'.
- 3.3 342 students registered as Face-to-face delegates, of which 294 attended Conference (non-attendance was therefore at 14%). It is recommended that the Association continues to explore ways of reducing non-attendance and stress the importance of registered students informing the Association Office well in advance if they are unable to attend.
- 3.5 Chart 2 shows attendance figures for Face-to-face delegates by demographic variables such as age, gender and disability, comparing these for 2016/2018. Chart 3 shows attendance by geographical location and Chart 4 by ethnicity; as the 2018 categories are different from 2016 (for example, national rather than regional breakdown for geographical location), these figures have not been directly compared with those of previous years.

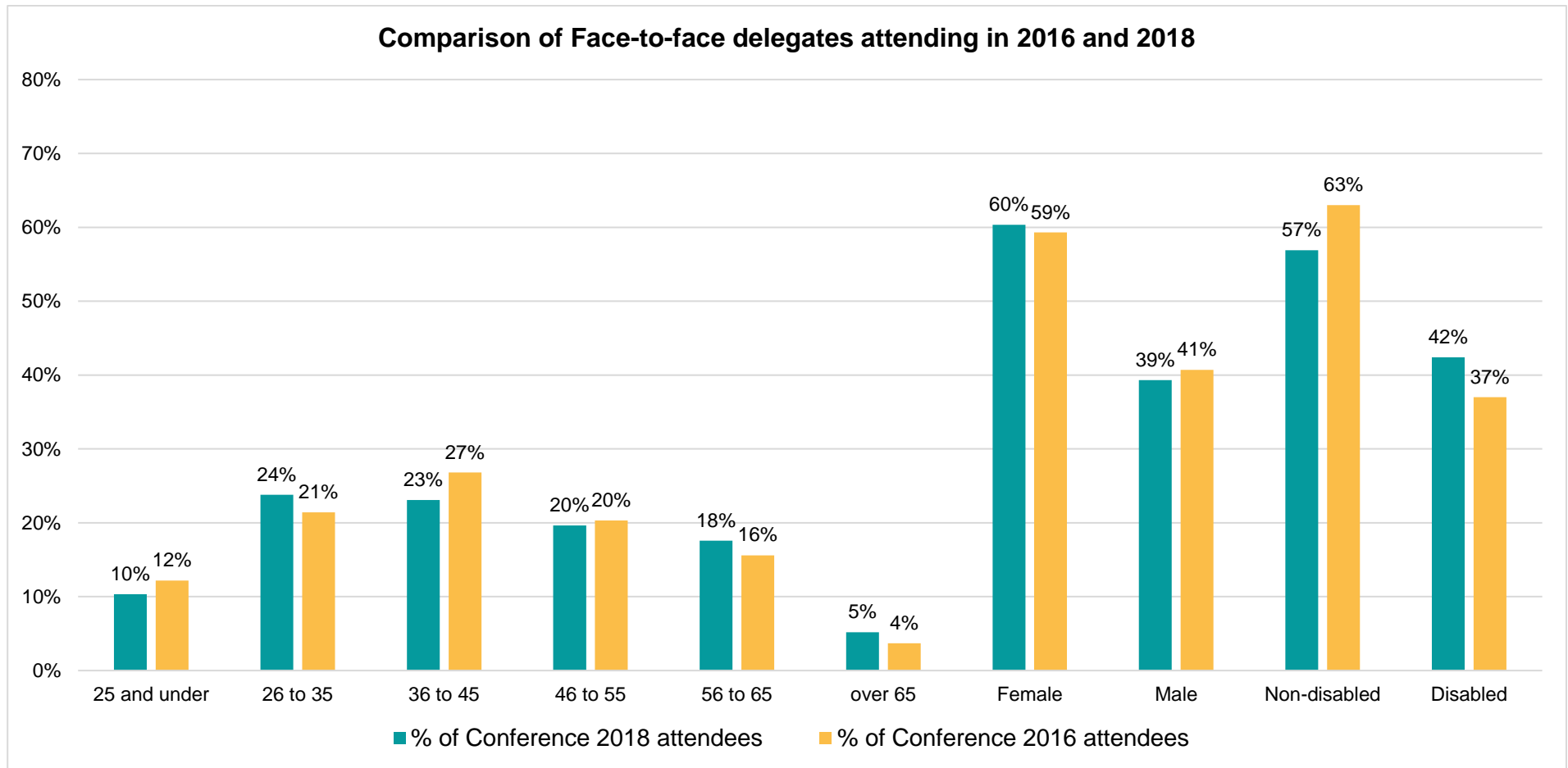


Chart 2. The proportion of Face-to-face Conference delegates are compared across different demographic variables for 2016 and 2018.

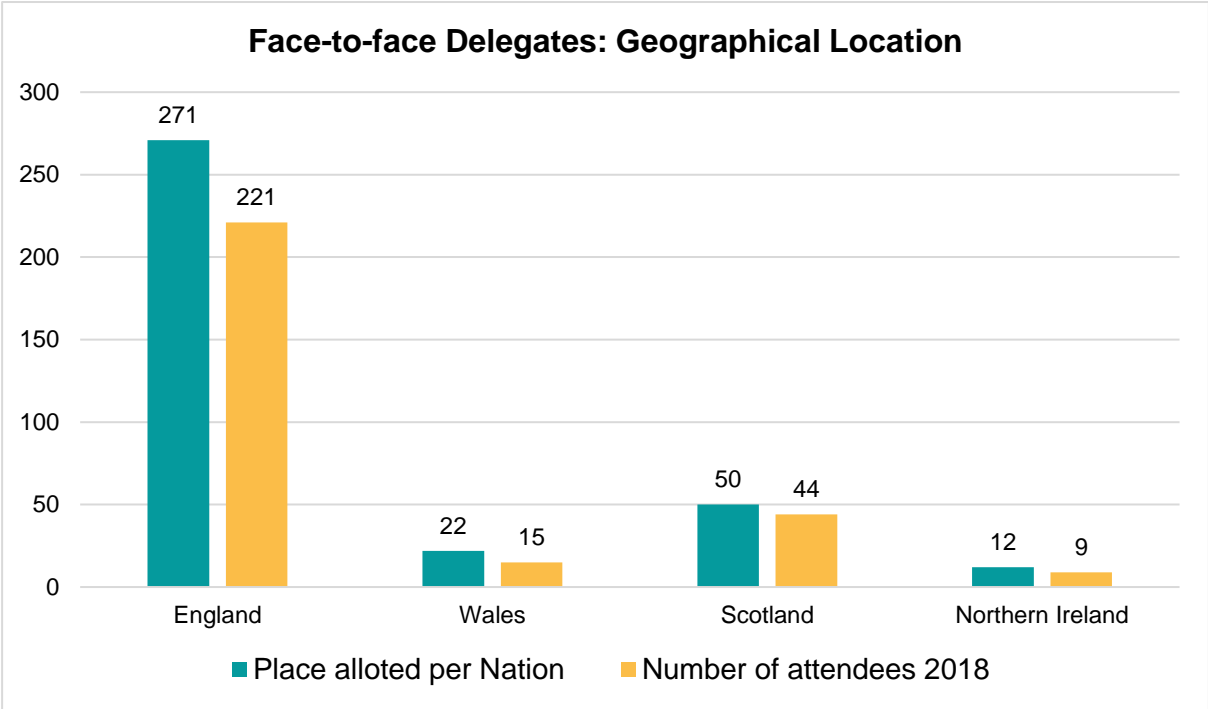


Chart 3. Delegate attendance by national allocation of places.

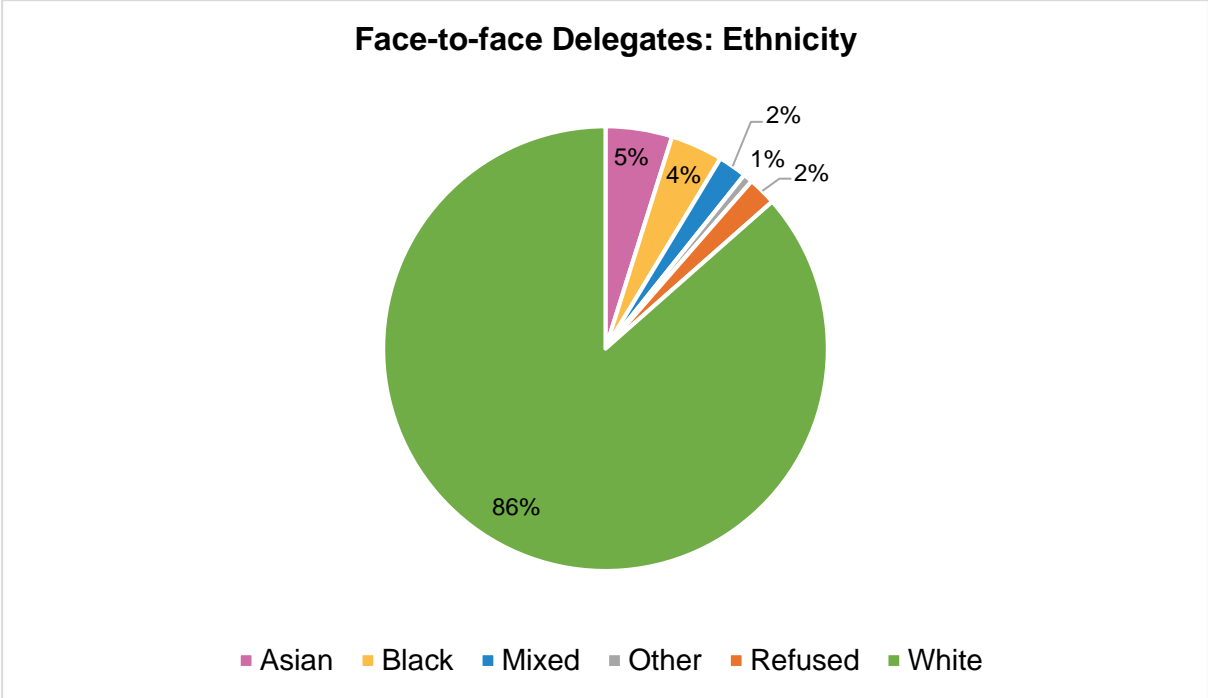


Chart 4. Delegate attendance by ethnicity.

#### 4. Face-to-face and Online Conference

- 4.1 The Face-to-face Delegates were asked about their motivations for attending Conference 2018. As shown in Chart 5, the most popular of these was 'to meet other OU students', selected by 85% of the respondents. Other motivations selected by over 50% of the respondents were 'to visit the Walton Hall campus' (59%), 'to vote on the Business resolutions' (56%), 'to learn more about the Association' (53%) and 'to learn more about the OU' (51%).
- 4.2 To achieve the key objectives for Conference 2018 (encouraging students to get involved in Association initiatives, raise awareness of support and services, and launch Student-Led Projects), *We are #OUstudents* was chosen as the theme and a concerted effort was made to raise awareness of the Students Association's work in supporting the student community.
- 4.3 As part of this effort, workshops led by different Association staff teams and student representatives were offered on areas such as Student Voice, Student Community and Student Support. A Societies Showcase, a workshop on Student-Led Projects offered by the Student Volunteering Team, and Meet and Greet events with the DSG and PLEXUS gave delegates an opportunity to learn about the Association's work.
- 4.4 Delegate comments suggest that they would have liked more time between workshops and other events, as some found it difficult to attend events that were timed close to each other but held at different locations on campus.

*"Well organised event. Would love to have been able to attend more workshops, just couldn't be in 2 places at once. Arrived a bit later on the Friday and missed out on the tours so would have been nice to have them on the Saturday too."*

*"Impossible to attend a workshop 4-5 at one side of campus and then get to 5-6 workshop on the other side of campus in time for start."*

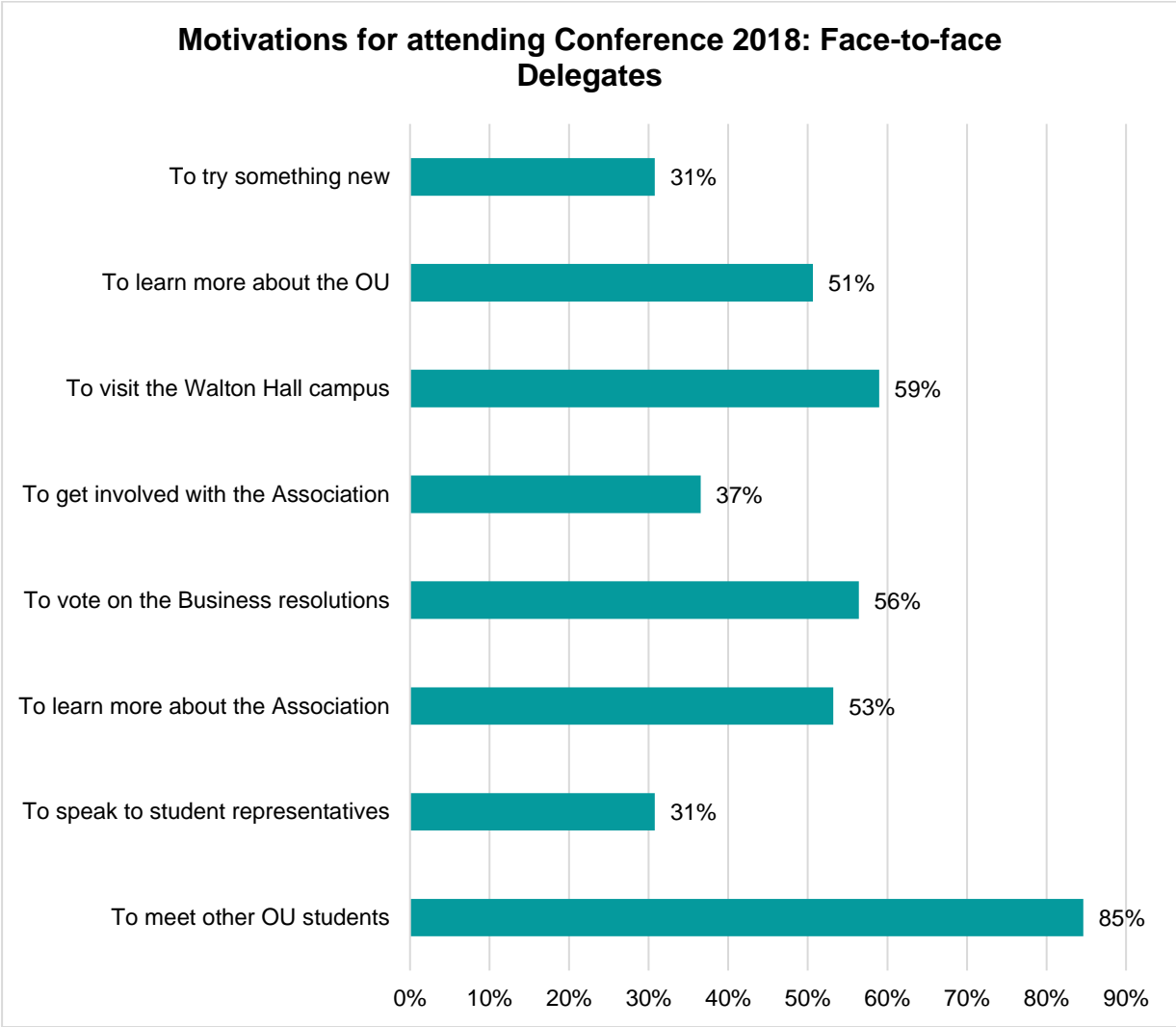


Chart 5. Motivations for attending Conference 2018: Face-to-face Delegates



- 4.5 Chart 6 shows Digital delegates' motivations for attending the Online Conference in 2018. 22% of Digital delegates selected 'to speak to other students online', in contrast to the Face-to-face delegates for whom meeting fellow students was the most popular motivation. The majority of the Digital delegates were motivated to attend in order 'to learn more about the Students Association' (78%). Over half indicated that they chose to attend Online Conference because they were 'not able to attend face-to-face' (59%), and that they 'wanted to explore ways to get involved with the Students Association' (56%). Other motivations were 'to vote on the Business resolutions' (46%), 'to learn more about the Open University' (44%), and 'to try something new' (39%).
- 4.6 The Online Conference microsite explained different elements of the Conference and encouraged community building through chat forums. Staff and student representatives were available to chat on the forums, and delegates had access to an Adobe Connect tutorial that included advice on navigating the Conference website and voting on the Business resolutions. Information about the Association's work was available throughout the weekend, highlighting areas such as affiliated Societies, Student-Led Projects, and the STUDIO show.
- 4.7 The Online Conference offered a range of activities designed for Digital Delegates, including content such as an online game and playlist of songs, and voting rights during Conference Business. Overall, the feedback from Digital Delegates suggests that the interactivity and engagement activities were well-received. Comments also mentioned the goodie bag, which included a Conference 2018 branded mug and a Costa voucher.

*"I got to interact with a range of different students, get involved in games and feel important with business matters. My voice, opinions and ideas were respected and heard. Also, the goodie bag that we received was also a highlight of the experience. It actually made me feel like I mattered. Overall, I would definitely do it again and I recommend it to all OU students."*

*"It was easier than I thought and not having to leave the comfort of your home to vote! I liked taking part via the forum and doing the fun online activities although I would have liked there to be more activities."*

*"I loved being able to vote and have my say, even though I couldn't physically attend, it made me feel like I mattered and am a part of the university...not just someone on the end of a PC."*

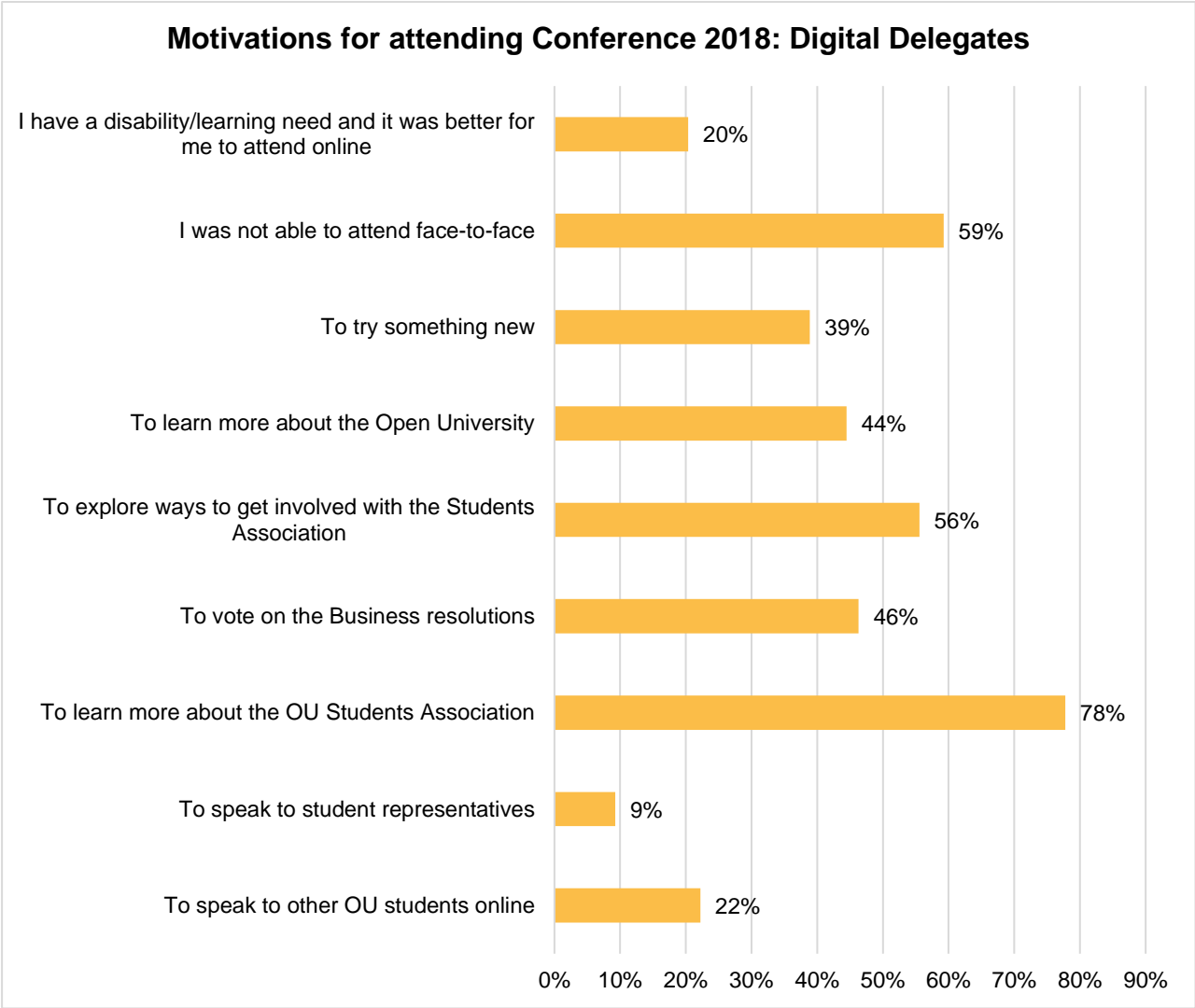


Chart 6. Motivations for attending Conference 2018: Digital Delegates

## 5. Conference Business

- 5.1 Conference Business is a vital aspect of Conference, offering students an opportunity to engage with important decisions about the way their Association is run. The motions presented to Conference 2018 included various amendments to the Association's Constitution and information about the Association's affiliation with other organisations and services.
- 5.2 To encourage delegate engagement with the Business aspect, the Business Champion role was designed so that student volunteers could clarify the Business element of Conference for fellow delegates. The Business Champions were offered online training and were supported by the staff Business Team at the Association Office. The 'Buzz for Conference Business' postcards were also posted to all delegates ahead of conference, including a checklist such as reading the Business documents and posting questions on the forums.
- 5.3 In the Face-to-face feedback survey, 65% of the respondents found the information about Conference Business to be 'very useful – just the right amount of information' (59% for Digital delegates), while 27% found it to be 'fairly useful – the information provided could have been more detailed' (28% for Digital delegates). Regarding the voting process during Conference Business, 72% found the information to be 'very useful' (59% for Digital delegates), while 20% found it to be 'fairly useful' (22% for Digital delegates).
- 5.4 Chart 7 shows delegate feedback indicating their agreement with different statements about Conference Business. As a result of attending Conference 2018, there was higher awareness of 'the important of the Business element in shaping how the Association is run'. While 72% of the face-to-face delegates strongly agreed that 'the voting process was easy', this figure was lower for Digital Delegates at 46%. Awareness of the Business Champions being available to discuss Business was low for both the Face-to-face and Digital Delegates.
- 5.5 In 2018, the Business documents were provided in a folder with individual booklets detailing different resolutions and reports. These were well-received, with most of the Face-to-face and Digital delegates agreeing that they were 'written in a clear and easy to understand language' and that they had 'read the Business documents in the lead up to the Conference weekend' (Chart 7). Signposting of the Business documents, however, could be improved.
- 5.6 In light of the delegate feedback, it is recommend that awareness of the new Business Champion role be improved, the Business documents made available earlier in the lead up to Conference, and voting information for Digital Delegates improved.



# Get the buzz for Conference Business



## Checklist to Business

- Log in to: [oustudents.com/conference-business](http://oustudents.com/conference-business)
- Read Conference papers
- Follow the link to the forum
- Prepare questions
- Post questions on the forums
- Business starts at 9am on Saturday! Bee there.



Grab a drink of your choice and get the buzz for Business!

*The 'Buzz for Conference Business' postcard*

### Conference Business: Face-to-face and Digital Delegates

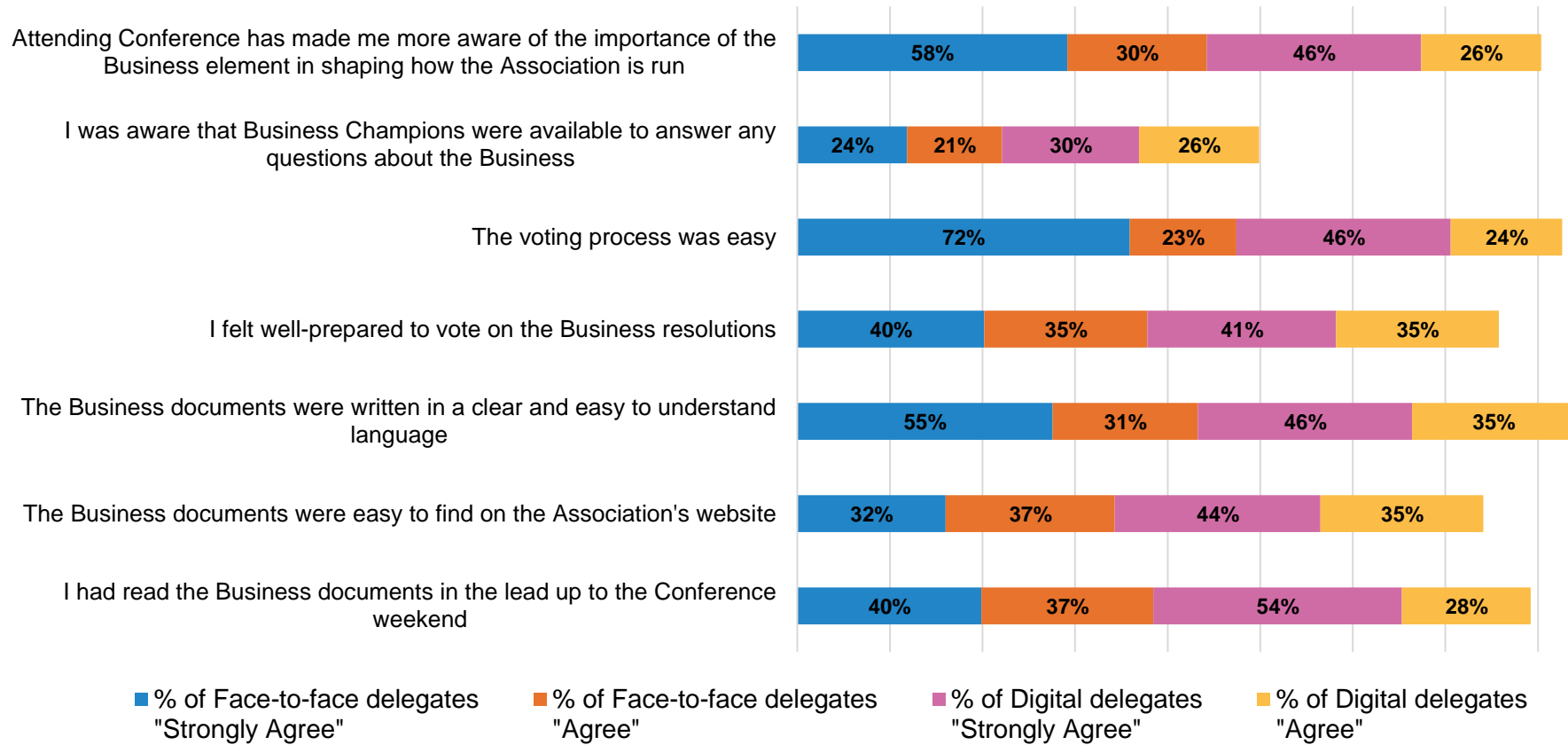


Chart 7. Feedback from both Face-to-face and Digital Delegates about different aspects of Conference Business in 2018.

### Awareness of the Students Association: Face-to-face and Digital Delegates

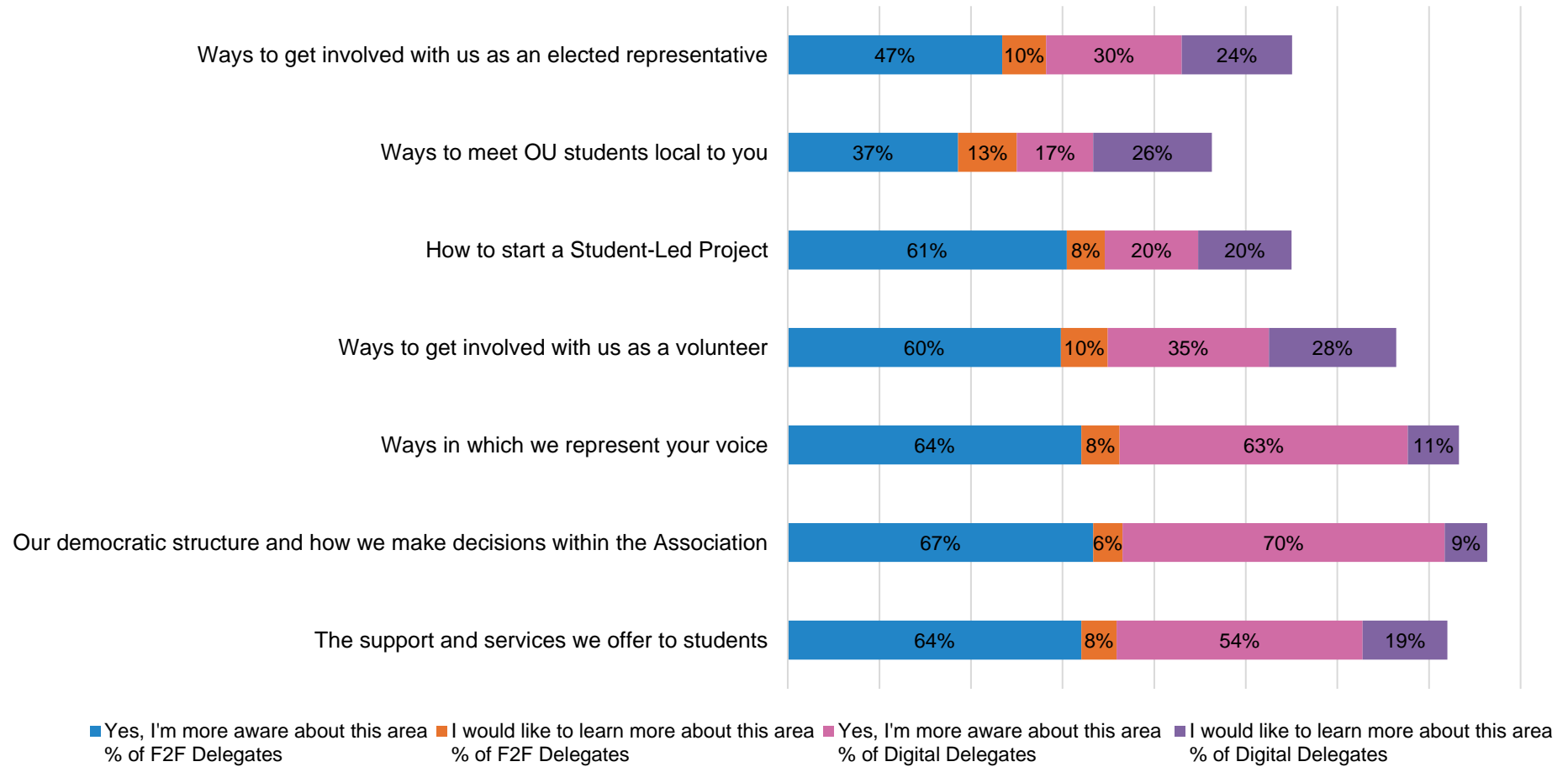


Chart 8. Delegate feedback on their awareness of the Association’s work as a result of attending Conference 2018.

## **6. Engagement with the Students Association**

- 6.1 The objectives for Conference 2018 were achieved, as understanding of the Business element improved, awareness was raised about the support and services offered by the Association, and students were inspired to get involved with the Association.
- 6.2 The Students Association Celebration 2018 showcased the Association's work and offered delegates an opportunity to get to know the newly elected student leadership team. Students Association Clubs were highlighted during the celebration and ideas for different interest-based clubs invited from the audience. As a result of this drive, the number of Students Association Clubs has increased (from just under 10) to 29 at the time of writing. Interest has also been generated in Student-Led Projects, with some students submitting their ideas to the Student Volunteering Team.
- 6.3 As shown in Chart 8, awareness of the Association's work as registered an increase, especially around 'our democratic structure and how we make decisions within the Association' (67% of Face-to-face delegates and 70% of Digital delegates), 'ways in which we represent your voice' (64% of Face-to-face delegates and 63% of Digital delegates), and 'the support and services we offer to students' (64% of Face-to-face delegates and 54% of Digital delegates).
- 6.4 Conference 2018 also offered delegates an opportunity to take on volunteer roles, undertaking specific activities as Walking Bus Leaders, Tour Guides, Shop Volunteers, Registration Volunteers, Meet and Greet Volunteers, Meal Time Helpers and Business Champions. There were 82 delegate volunteers or Conference Makers in 2018. Of the 59 delegate volunteers who took the feedback survey, 61% 'strongly agreed' and 15% 'agreed' that they 'had a good experience volunteering as a Conference Maker'. Feedback around training and support needs will be forwarded on to the Volunteering Team.
- 6.5 The CEC are asked to discuss the six 'issues to consider'/recommendations highlighted in the cover paper, to further improve the Conference experience and build on the achievements of Conference 2018 in engaging the student community.

*“It was wonderful to see the campus and to meet so many students. There was so much passion for the OU and for making things better for students. It made me feel proud to be an OU student and eager to be more involved in the student community. E.g. joining clubs/societies, going to meet-ups and making my voice heard. I would be keen to volunteer if the right role were to come up.”*

*“A wonderful way to realise you are not studying alone but as part of a huge body of students who all share the same highs and lows as you do.”*

*“Conference made me aware of how professional an operation the Students Association is and I was awed by how much they do and how well they do it.”*

*“It was an extraordinary experience to meet other students from various backgrounds and to see the campus. I very much enjoyed the positive atmosphere that underpinned the event.”*

*“Having gone into the event knowing nobody, I left after a great weekend feeling like a part of a welcoming, thriving community.”*

