

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

25 September – 6 October 2020

CONFERENCE 2020 EVALUATION REPORT

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **note** the evaluation report
- ii) **discuss** the issues to consider

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report introduces the evaluation of Conference 2020, held over the weekend of 24 – 26 June, which in the wake of the pandemic was staged completely online for the first time in its history. Following national lockdown in late March, and after much deliberation by student representatives, trustees and staff members, the event was given the go ahead to proceed as planned but to take place in an all online arena. This meant the abandoning of several months of preparation and the immediate shift of focus to transferring and altering arrangements to suit an online platform. It was no mean feat that in less than 12 weeks, sterling efforts by the Conference Steering Committee in conjunction with the staff team under the capable coordination of Amy Undrell, saw the successful delivery of the Student Association Conference 2020.
- 1.2 There was inevitably much disappointment felt at losing the face to face element of this flagship event that in normal circumstances would see around 400 students welcomed to their campus to take part in a full agenda of business and social events. This alongside a similar student group who would have had access to the business and some social activities online. However, in spite of the considerable time pressures in developing a suitable programme, the research, development and testing required to employ the right technology and a significant learning curve to climb for all concerned, delegate feedback has given Conference 2020 a big thumbs up.
- 1.3 With the business element of Conference completed in the week prior to the event, the weekend's agenda was packed with interesting speakers and presenters, opportunities to hear from and talk with Association representatives and plenty of chances to socialise, have fun and enjoy the

company of fellow students and all from the comfort of bedrooms, box rooms and broom cupboards.

- 1.4 This report reveals that 85% of students were satisfied with the first ever Student Association online biennial Conference; that 82% would recommend it to others; that 77% agreed that it made them feel part of the community and 83% thought it had made a positive contribution to their student experience.
- 1.5 Feedback was collected through a delegate survey, the results of which form the basis of this evaluation, which inform the recommendations included in this report.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Being an all online event, the issues raised were different in substance to previous Conference but will provide valuable input for future online events and are as follows:
 - i) Accessibility requirements: Improve the provision of transcripts and live captioning for the hard of hearing.
 - ii) Chat function: Have the provision of the chat function as a key consideration when choosing online platforms, with early identification of any technical glitches that delegates might face.
 - iii) Support with Guidebook and Microsoft Teams: Delegates would have found it helpful to have details of Guidebook emailed further in advance. For future events perhaps the Tech Helpdesk could be offered earlier to give delegates time to check whether all the applications are working for them.
 - iv) Ensure new students feel they are actively invited to interact: Ensure that new students feel involved in conversations and present discussion topics in a way that encourages participation from those who are engaging for the first time.
- 2.2 Members are asked to discuss these considerations.

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