Appendix 2 – Governance Review Focus Group Feedback

Session name	Date	Attendees registered	Actual attendees
All Students	Monday 6 September @ 7pm	12	10
BAME Students	Monday 6 September @7pm	No pre-reg. Session cancelled	
PGR Students	Tuesday 7 September @11:30	2	1
Committee Members (DSG, OUPride, BAME)	Tuesday 7 September @ 7pm	5	3
Volunteers (evening session)	Tuesday 7 September @7pm	7	2
Young Students (U25s)	Wednesday 8 September @ 7pm	1	0 – session did not go ahead
Volunteers (morning session)	Thursday 9 September @ 10am	3	2
'Time-pressured' students – studying alongside caring/parenting responsibilities	Thursday 9 September @ 7:30pm	4	1
'Time pressured' students – studying alongside full-time employment	Saturday 11 September @ 9am	4	2
Volunteers (weekend session)	Saturday 11 September @ 11am	1	Attendee joined the UK Nations/International students session.
UK Nations & International students	Saturday 11 September @ 2pm	3	2

Discussion topic 1 - Thinking about the Student Representation Forum – What mix of students would you like to see on the Forum in order that your voice and views can be effectively represented and can be used to help inform the work and decisions of the Student Leadership Committee?

	Mix of students	*Effective representation*	*Feeding into the work of the SLC*
All Students	By demographic, geographic and degree/subject area. Students want to be represented by someone like themselves, who have the experience, knowledge, and ability to represent them. This proposal reduces burden on CEC members, increase to overall resources and widen participation for people who do not want to stand in elections.	Broad range of demographic groups and groups with protected characteristics that it would be hard to have a representative for each group. Suggested that sub-groups/task and finish groups be used. Need to know how to engage and be clear on aims of review to measure effectiveness of change.	Regional structure that fed into a central committee and allowed all members to vote and Conference was also discussed. Importance of communication between SRF, SLC and students.
PGR	Given the size of the student body, this project was a large undertaking, and it would be wise to look at the distribution of work.	PGRs are supported by the OUs Grad School, they don't find the Association relevant. Changes to the Governance is opportunity to change this. Having PGR students (ideally one international and one to represent full/part) in the forum will give other PGRs a sense of ownership. The student commented that the OU student population is always changing and needs to be represented in a way that reflects this.	

Committee members	Diversity in elected/appointed positions to demonstrate trust and fairness. This could be avoided by either all elected or all appointed roles and avoid any assumed hierarchy. Would need to have detailed job description and even referenced to prove capability.	Consider the array of disabilities that need representation (physical health, mental health, neurodiversity etc). If there is a rep for disabled students, this should be a disabled person and be able to help and support in a way that does not undermine the opinion or disability of the student.	SLC need to be able and willing to consult with student body. Scrutiny panel to ensure that manifesto is held to account and that reps do what they have proposed and hold them to account. Consider a scrutiny panel which will also feedback to students and close the feedback loop.
Full-time workers		Students not available in the day and timing of events and meetings needed to be considered to make them accessible to full-time workers. One student felt it was important for this group to be represented by a student with an appreciation of these conflicting pressures. Conversely, the other student felt they would be better represented based on their academic interests.	
Carers	This group felt it was important to understand the background of the reps, so students know they are being represented by people from similar backgrounds/shared experience. They would like to see representation for the following groups:		

	• carers • parents • Disabilities • BAME • Women (noted that they are well represented on CEC)		
UK Nations & International		Students falling under the EDI umbrella could be divided further to consider different types of support and representation needs for the different groups. Student forum should be a diverse place made up of students with lived experience and different characteristics.	
Volunteers	One participant highlighted that they belonged to several characteristic grouping and felt it is important that a diverse mix of students would be represented in the Forum. They wanted to see students representing their characteristics. Another participant disagreed that positions should be apportioned on any characteristic, felt strongly that if the Forum was elected based on their expertise this would organically provide a diverse mix	One participant felt that the proposed structure was based on other student unions at brick universities, were unconvinced whether it is suitable for distance learning. One student didn't want to see a rigid election process by which students were only able to stand against how to represent their characteristic group, but on their own expertise set, which should not be categorised by a process.	

	of students. Student Forum to include faculty specific members.		
General themes	Diversity. Representation of protected characteristics. Representation of time-poor students	Flexibility to ensure all groups can be represented. Sub-groups. Reps with appreciation of struggles felt by the group they represent.	Communication. Consultation. Accountability.

"Discussion topic 2 - How would you like the Student Leadership Committee to engage with you about their work? How should the work and impact of the Student Leadership Committee be communicated to the wider student body?"

All students	General positive feelings about the scrutiny panel from most students although one participant raised a concern of the scrutiny panel being a sub-set of the SRF resulting in an elite group scrutinising another elite group. Three students also explicitly mentioned their concern about the reduction in officers. Suggestions included: • Faculties to promote reps work • Improve forums • Alternative to minutes as they are hard to follow full discussion/decision making process • Have regular updates from CEC • Broadcast or record meetings to be made available within 24hrs. • Offer shadowing/social media take over etc to new recruits looking to build career skills
PGR	Would like to see separate Association for the PGRs. Communication throughout the PGR journey and not just when there is a problem.
Committee members	Accessibility needs to be at the forefront of all communications – ensuring all communications on all platforms have subtitles, picture descriptions, audio descriptions etc and allowing everyone to interact with the content. One student suggested a twice-yearly newsletter that was posted to them; something they could sit and read over a coffee and reduce screen fatigue.Need to remember students are time poor and comms need to be quick and engaging. Communication from CEC (either as a direct bulletin or on socials/The Hoot etc) without having to dig around for it. Awareness on both sides would bring more meaningful conversations
Full-time workers	Students liked the Association newsletter and would like to see clear and concise comms which contain links to more in-depth information about the topics. Do not engage with The Hoot but would like to see a regular digest of articles that might be of interest to them. Social media would be best used for informing students about events, deadlines, and campaigns. The use of social media, e-mails and surveys allowed them to engage with the Association on their own time.

Carers	Transparency is required via a clear chain of command. Minutes can often take too long to read and understand and would prefer a summary. Website was hard to navigate Enjoy using The Hoot, the President's blog and receiving e-mails. Relationship between the Association and the OU needs to be clearer. Clearer view of who the reps are and what they represent.
UK Nations & International	E-mail digest from SLC. Materials in alternative formats and on different platform. Ask students to feedback on variety of areas and increase engagement. One student mentioned that volunteering groups can get cliquey. Understand difference between OU and Association in a simple way. Regional sessions, opportunity to meet the reps. A lot of students prefer not to use social media and the VLE forums are clunky.
Volunteers	One area where the Association needs to do more is telling students about what the Association does. The BoT/CEC minutes do not engage students and need to be communicated in a more student friendly way. Opportunity for observers to attend CEC meetings in MK and socialise with CEC members was thought to be a positive. Blog posts would create visibility - one student not aware of president's blog. Not keen on live broadcast of CEC, but happy with post-CEC summary being published. Student Leadership Committee would need to be more open, transparent and accountable for their work to the general student body. Felt the wider student body only hear about big issues or at certain times of year. Need to understand the reasons for not being able to contact the whole student body and impact of confidentiality agreements when reporting. Issues were highlighted about reaching students who didn't use social media, unfriendly website, plethora of forums and difficulty in finding information on them or having opportunity to contribute to them.
General themes	Transparency - broadcasting meetings/clear and concise communications. Use a variety of comms channels to enhance engagement and visibility. Alternative to minutes - more of summary that makes it easier to follow the issue and resolution.

Discussion topic 3 - What could the Association do to ensure that roles in the Student Leadership Committee & the Student Representation Forum are accessible to students like yourselves?

All Students	Ensuring roles descriptions were accessible, consistent, and easily available. Better services for blind and deaf students were highlighted. Tie in disciplinary rule with the job description. Contact details for reps could be clearer for students to determine who is the best rep to contact about their issue. clear expectations for rep roles with explicit details on the commitment required across the year with one student suggesting a 'day in the life of a rep' to personalise reps and demonstrate requirements. Evaluating larger roles to break tasks down for easier delegation and include a rolling quarterly timetable of task and finish opportunities to allow reps to manage workloads.
PGR	PGRs are very time poor - needs to be engaging and quick. PGRs are mostly on site so it should be easier to communicate and engage. Weekly social drop-ins about a variety to topics that appeal to wide selection of students.
Committee members	Have reps that have DSG/OUPride/BAME lived experience so they have a meaningful understanding of the barriers faced by those with the protected characteristics.Full accessible role descriptions.Show support and explicitly say that they will support anyone with protected characteristics to fulfil their role.Training, remote working, and flexibility.
Full-time workers	Neither student had considered volunteering with the Association but had done/were doing other types of volunteering. The key theme to engaging with this group/offering volunteering opportunities was flexibility; task and finish groups, events that students can dip in and out of, flexibility to submit ideas and suggestions online over a longer period, option for weekend and evening groups.
Carers	In-depth role descriptions which are advertised more prominently on our comms channels. Time commitment should be clear, as well as the benefits of volunteering such as CV enhancing.

	Testimonials from previous reps and the ability to avoid commitment around TMA/EMA time. Spreading the workload; each rep be supported on a forum by 2-3 others who can share information, report, and summarise information.
UK Nations & International	Using different channels such as the website, the Hoot, email newsletter, official social media groups. Annual statements about what the Association is doing, something accessible that clarifies some of the aspects that are otherwise limited to the Business section of Conference. Participants felt that the Association could do both – general messaging to all students as well as targeted messaging for groups where the Association needs to improve representation.
Volunteers	Experience of volunteering via the earlier regional structure, which helped students get involved in discussions/debates without too much prior knowledge or having to read lots of papers. Absence of the regional structure, the participant thought that senior leadership role might not be accessible to time-poor students, especially single parents, people in full time work etc. Continue with initiatives such as Microvolunteering. Rewarding students for their time with vouchers. Agree with term limits. No new students coming forward creates a reliance on longer-serving volunteers. Flexible working to support reps who have other commitments. Concise role descriptions and explicit details on time commitment and workload. Avoid MK centric roles. Reduce reliance on social media during elections and husting. Relevant and timely training
General themes	Consistently accessible formats across all comms channels. Ability to delegate larger activities with task and finish groups. Quick engaging information on the roles as well as the ability to view in-depth role descriptions. Flexible timings to promote inclusivity of students.

Discussion topic 4 - What types of business and policy-focussed topics and activities would you like to see included at the new format online Annual General Meeting? (Please bear in mind that this would be separate from any face-to-face conference/community building events)

What would encourage you to attend the online Annual General Meeting?

	Activities for online AGM	*Encouraging attendance at AGM*
All students	Propose agenda items and suggestions for voting via a clear referral structure. Allow time for constructive debate. Voting and resolution. Discussion with wider student body. Discuss OUs position on topics such as environment and formulate a response/position for the Association. If online, it would need to be more interactive than forums	Students expressed concern about 'divorcing' Conference from the AGM. It was said the fun part of Conference is a way to entice a variety of students to take part in business. There was concern about the proposed quoracy levels.
PGR	Need to have a variety of activities to attract people to take part. Showcase achievements and plans. Showcase membership benefits. Debate on policy and positional statements.	Conference and AGM to be kept together to maximise engagement and draw a diverse crowd. Comms need to be fully accessible.
Committee members	Key points of strategy.Discuss how to improve representation.Ability to put forward discussion topics.Discuss key milestones that Association and OU can work towards together.	Engage with students throughout year, not just at AGM or Conference.
Full-time workers	Face-to-face events add a social element and were key to community building and particularly useful for newer students.	General sessions being held such as inviting celebrities to hold talks on relevant/interesting topic areas.

	Students would like to see bite-sized sessions with recording options, ability to hop in and out of meetings and a clearly laid out agenda that could be understood by all students.	
Carers	Hear from internal speakers such as the VC and other OU based consultants that have relevant information about issues affecting the Association/OU students. 2 different types of sessions be held; 1) policies and position statements, 2) business for reps, how the Association is run etc.	Liked the idea of an online format as it made it more accessible and faster. Smaller sessions held over a longer period (e.g., a week).
UK Nations & International	An announcement/infographic about how Association spending has been apportioned to different areas, as well as plans for the upcoming year that students could feed into. Having speakers from the HE sector, OU alumni, motivational speakers.	Worry that as a business meeting, the language/phrasing would not be accessible to students - needs to be simple and explained. Chat box during online meetings where students could clarify the meaning of different terms. Students may not think they had anything to contribute to the AGM if they aren't clear on what the business is about. Freebies to students attending would be a good idea and would incentivise participation. Open the AGM to as many students as possible. Run multiple sessions during the AGM so that more students can attend.
Volunteers	Students should be able to present proposals - but this works better face-to-face. Biennial Conference leaves too long a	2 students not keen on online format. Concerns over how students will be involved in debate and discussion. One participant felt voting before conference last time

	gap to hold current CEC accountable. Percentage of people voting in AGMs was important, otherwise the AGM could become a perfunctory event. 2 students agreed that this new structure allowed for more participation by students in the AGM - but does not mean that the students would engage with the business side. Students able to discuss and debate business changes - policy should be scrutinised with potential to order topics at AGM. 2 students felt face-to-face community event should be separate so that business was not lost.	took away ability to speak and felt time allocated for meaningful discussion around business would encourage them to attend. Another participant would be deterred by a random draw to attend AGM, if those attending did not read papers ahead of voting.
General themes	Clear agenda to allow flexibility at events (students can hop in and out of different sessions). Ability to propose discussion and debate topics. Activities or speakers to attract students to attend. Better forums for online interaction.	There were mixed views on AGM and Conference being two separate events. Some felt that the best way to engage students was to include interesting speakers and talks. Others felt that those activities could distract students from the importance of the AGM. All comms need to be accessible and clear to students so they understand what they are voting on. The ability to hold AGM online makes it more accessible to students.

Other comments and questions raised outside of the discussion topics

All students	Open Learn course, explaining how the Association works, what opportunities there are and how to get involved. One student expressed concern about the payment of the President and Deputy President roles, thus making it less accessible to those who need to reapply for benefits at the end of their term. General feelings of dissatisfaction that students are not being consulted on whether to go ahead with changes with no mechanism to completely disagree with all changes. Concern was also expressed about any changes being implemented would be hard to reverse. Students also commented on the suitability of the external agency procured to undertake the initial Governance Reform study and the methodology used. A comment was also made how we should prioritise agenda items like a 50% vacancy rate on BoS before we make Governance Reforms. Suitability of the name 'Student Representation Forum'. Students felt there was a blurring with academic governance/representation What is the role of SRF? What will they do? What is their remit? What are the different roles expected on the SLC?
PGRs	
Committee members	If forum is made of elected and appointed roles would there be a hierarchy and what would this look like? Could an external appointment be considered?What is the need and rationale for elected and appointed roles?
Volunteers	Reservations about the questions being about implementation, as opposed to approving the recommendation. How those students are going to be selected – a perception of there being a layer of bureaucracy. Why the current structure should be changed? Would a small leadership team present difficulties if they are not all paid (like the President and Deputy President). Mentioned that in other student unions, all sabbatical officers are paid. One participant raised concern that Governance Report was achieved by interviewing students from CEC/Board of Trustees and 5 other students, which they felt was not representative.

	Queried whether this focus group consultations were already after recommendations accepted. Facilitator highlighted recommendations haven't been accepted and focus groups will help inform shape of any proposals going to Conference for vote. Participant agreed for the Facilitator to take this point away.
	Questioned whether the smaller structure (Leadership Team) would create a democratic deficit.