

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)

8 – 10 October 2021

2021 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) ANALYSIS

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **Receive** the 2021 NSS Analysis
- ii) **Discuss and propose** actions to help improve the 2022 results

1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual survey commissioned by the Office for Students (OfS) to invite feedback on the student experience. As a publicly funded Higher Education Institution the Open University takes part in this survey each year, and provides details for a representative sample of students to receive the survey.
- 1.2 The 2021 round of the NSS received 16078 responses from OU students, with an overall response rate of 58%. A response rate of at least 50% is required for an institution to be able to publish its results.
- 1.3 The key measure for the OU Students Association is Q26, which is specific to student unions. Students are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement:

'The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests'.
- 1.4 Two Appendices are included with the paper:
 - Appendix 1 – 2021 NSS Results
 - Appendix 2 – Year-on-Year tracking for 2017 to 2021.

PLEASE NOTE: Appendix 2 is strictly confidential as it includes results for the 2020 NSS which cannot be published as the Open University did not meet the response threshold required for publication.

2. KEY STATISTICS

2.1 The Students Association's %Agree (that is, those students selecting 'definitely agree' and 'mostly agree' in response to Q26) for 2021 was 43.43%. This is the lowest score for the Association since the introduction of the newly worded Q26 in 2017.

2.2 Some key figures for the OU Students Association from the 2021 NSS are:

- The overall awareness of the Association is at 85.64%. By awareness we mean all students who responded to Q26, excluding those who selected 'Not applicable'.
- Taking the 'Not applicable' count as a proxy measure for those unaware of the Association, the overall unaware proportion among respondents is at 14.36%.
- %Agree: This is calculated after removing respondents selecting 'Not applicable' from the total number of respondents, ie it is the percentage of responders who are aware of the Association that selected agree options to Q26. The Association's %Agree for Q26 is at 43.43%.
- %Disagree: This is calculated after removing respondents selecting 'Not applicable' from the total number of respondents, ie it is the percentage of responders who are aware of the Association that selected disagree options to Q26. Relatively few respondents (6.47%) selected this option.

2.3 The Association undertakes further analysis to better understand student feedback specific to our academic representation work.

- *Those showing a distinct opinion in response to Q26:* This calculation is based on the proportion of students who show a distinct opinion by selecting 'agree' or 'disagree' answer options, ie it excludes students who select the 'neither agree nor disagree' option. This measure helps us understand the proportion of students who have a distinct opinion on our academic representation work.
- *Satisfaction figures among those showing a distinct opinion:* This is calculated as the proportion of students who are satisfied (that is, selecting the 'definitely agree' and 'mostly agree' answer options) amongst those showing a distinct opinion. This measure helps us understand how satisfied students who have a distinct opinion are with our academic representation work.
- In 2021, only 42.74% of students had a distinct opinion on the Association's academic representation work. However, of those who did, 87.03% were satisfied. This indicates that while the Association's academic representation work has good relevance for students, perhaps more work needs to be done to make students aware of our

work and how they can approach the Association/representatives for matters relating to academic representation.

- 2.4 This analysis presents student feedback in two appendices. Appendix A focuses on the 2021 round of the NSS, while Appendix B charts the Association's NSS results over the period 2017-2021. Together, these present an opportunity to consider our NSS scores in terms of current priorities, such as the student groups or subject areas that have scored low on the Q26 measure, as well as a broader overview of the Association's performance over the years.

Appendix A:

- Student feedback is analysed by taking into consideration different demographic groupings along the variables of age, gender, ethnicity and disability. The gap between the Association's %Agree on Q26 and that of the sector is at 9.85%, with the Association lagging behind the sector. This gap is widest for students who are Mature, Female, have 'No known disability', and identify as belonging to 'Other ethnicity'. However, the gap is much smaller for students who have a 'Specific learning disability', 'Other disability', and identify as belonging to 'Mixed ethnicity'.
- The courses with the highest %Agree scores on Q26 were *Diploma of Higher Education in Early Childhood, BA (Honours) Health and Social Care, Foundation Degree in Healthcare Practice, BA (Honours) Social Work (Scotland)* and *Diploma of Higher Education in Business Management*. The courses with the lowest %Agree scores were *BSc (Honours) Mathematics and Physics, Certificate of Higher Education Open, BA (Honours) History and Politics, BA (Honours) International Studies, Diploma of Higher Education in Computing & IT* and *BSc (Honours) Physics*.

Appendix B:

- The data presented here tracks the Association's performance on Q26 between 2017 and 2021. Both demographic groupings as well as broad subject areas are shown, and the changes in %Agree highlighted over 2017-2021. A comparison of the Association's overall performance with the sector average is also presented, together with the OU's overall satisfaction scores against the sector average.

3. DISCUSSION AREAS

- 3.1 The Association's 'distinct opinion' and 'satisfaction' measures for the NSS are linked to our key strategic objectives of *Inform and Support* (increase awareness and improve relevance) and *Influence and Transform* (increase influence and improve impact).

3.2 The CEC is asked to consider the following areas where steps could be taken to increase awareness of our academic representation work and strengthen impact reporting for the student community, and to propose courses of action to seek to improve the 2022 NSS scores:

- Identifying initiatives that could be put in place for the student groups and subject areas that have low %Agree scores on Q26 in 2021
- Identifying areas where the Association can highlight the impact of the work done by student volunteers, specifically in the context of academic representation (examples could be any student voice activities, or any wins when taking the student voice forward in committee meetings)
- Exploring how we define and measure progress in the area of academic representation
- Generating engagement in the run-up to the next round of the NSS survey launching in January 2022, such as through quick polls on what students understand by academic representation
- Identifying the strategic benefits in relation to our Inform and Support and Influence and Transform strands by engaging the student community in dialogue about academic representation

Pooja Sinha
Research and Information Officer

Fanni Zombor
Vice President Engagement