

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
HELD ONLINE
ON SATURDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

1. Welcome

The Chair addressed the meeting and thanked those attending OUPS' first online AGM. This year, OUPS were unable to organise a face-to-face AGM due to the Covid-19 restrictions currently in place.

1.1. Apologies

Apologies were received from David Clarke (trustee), Dr. Richard Stevens (Vice President) and Professor Neil Frude (Vice President).

1.2. Members present

11 members were present at the meeting, of which 7 were trustees of the society.

2. Chairperson's Report

The Chair wanted to update the meeting on OUPS activity, finance and product, and on structure and governance. He started by reflecting on the purpose of OUPS and why the charity exists.

OUPS is a registered charity, and as such we have a legal requirement to state the charitable objects, i.e. why the society should be given charitable status, which carries legal and financial obligations and advantages.

These charitable objects are stated in OUPS Constitution, and filed with the Charity Commission in the UK, and they are:

"to advance public education in psychology amongst members of the Open University who are taking, have taken, or are proposing to take courses in psychology or cognate subjects with the Open University."

And we declare on our website that we exist:

“to support OU psychology students both academically and socially throughout your studies and also after you graduate [and] to give you opportunities to enrich your study and your enjoyment of psychology.”

There is a firm consensus within the current OUPS Committee that an important aspect of how the society goes about meeting these goals is by providing face-to-face events that give distance-learning students the opportunity to meet other people who are involved or interested in psychology. This is for fun, to exchange ideas and experiences and to network with professional psychologists.

However, in the past few years, the number of attendees at OUPS events has been declining. There has been a complete demographic shift in the OU student body in the last five years. Exams have been removed which meant no revision weekends (apart from DE200). Also, the removal of the government subsidy for university education led to a tripling of university fees. The combination of all these changes means that:

- The percentage of time-rich, more mature students is far lower than it was;
- The percentage of busy, younger students has increased;
- Many more students select the OU as their first-choice university because they can study online, in their own time.

Feedback from the face-to-face events is always very good and attendees usually state that they appreciate the opportunity to meet other people with similar interests. But maybe the majority of students do not have the childcare, or the time/funds to travel or the inclination to socialise, or maybe they would just prefer to join in remotely.

So given these changes, one question arises: how does OUPS need to change to meet its goals to advance public education, support OU psychology students academically and socially and to give them opportunities to enrich their study and enjoyment of psychology? One answer might be that some of the activity should move to online options, either a combination of face-to-face and online, or perhaps online only. The pandemic situation forced organisations to invest in online options, therefore this might be the right time for OUPS to adjust its offerings too.

However, the Chair noted that in a volunteer-run organisation it is critical that the people who run it are excited and motivated about doing the kind of work required - enthusiastic committees have been the foundation of OUPS' success since it was founded almost fifty years ago. It is quite possible that OUPS might reach a point where the demand for face-to-face events will be exceeded by demand for online events. For instance, there was a number of international attendees at online events this year and this might increase in the future. Given that OUPS have a current committee made of members who are mostly interested in advancing face-to-face opportunities, perhaps there is the need to find a new group of volunteers who are enthusiastic about organising online events to make sure that OUPS can continue for the next fifty years.

Finances

The Chair reminded the meeting that, for a number of years OUPS events were costing more than the charged price. This was because the running cost of OUPS as it was structured was too high for the number of attendees. So OUPS made repeated and significant annual losses.

To address this, OUPS adjusted the prices in line with venue costs and reduced the overheads. A set of measures were taken, such as (not an exhaustive list):

- Investing in the website and management systems to make the Paperless distribution processes more seamless and reduce administration effort further;
- Moving to online booking only (no paper or phone booking) so one single online credit-card provider could be used, with cheaper contactless kit and no phone costs or effort;
- Using the minimum number of OUPS committee members at weekends other than May, when all the committee is included to avoid the cost of holding a separate event for the AGM and the first ECM after the committee elections;
- Negotiated the arrangements with Warwick Conferences to avoid unnecessary costs for unsold rooms;
- Not having a paid Business Administrator and moving the booking, enquiry and support services online to be done by the Chair, Treasurer and Secretary.

The Chair noted that this has meant a lot more administration work, and that there will be a significant change to the work that the members of the OUPS committee need to do from now on. More members of the committee will have to take on some of this administration work as the number of online support tickets grows.

The Chair concluded that costs and income are more sensibly aligned and the society has a sustainable basis to grow from. In his view, without these changes, this could have been the year that OUPS went bankrupt, but now the Chair believes OUPS have a future.

Product

The Chair pointed out that there still is too little awareness of OUPS in the OU student body, and although OUPS significantly increased its promotion work (e.g. we co-marketing with The Royal Institution, the BPS, The Weekend University and others), the conversion ratio remains low (1-4%). For example, we might market a general interest event to 1500 mailboxes, see 80% of those emails opened (1200) and only end up with 15-50 bookings.

The COVID pandemic stopped the face-to-face event programme, but it brought the opportunity of offering online events. OUPS were able to meet this demand through both online-only and hybrid (live-streamed) events.

The Chair was pleased to say that OUPS were also able to further its agenda to increase access to events, through subsidised places and by offering online access, though cost continues to be an important issue.

Online-only events

London & South OUPS invested in an online platform when lockdown started and organised six online talks and a full-day conference in the last five months, some free and some paid. A huge amount of work had to be done in order to integrate the website and booking systems with the different online platforms, but the feedback has been fantastic, the annual investment in this has now paid off and so LOUPS will try to make future London online events cheaper to reflect this.

Hybrid (both online and in-person) events

Warwick Conferences have also invested in livestreaming equipment and so, for the first time, OUPS were able to make an online option available for the “Transitioning to DE200” and “DE300 Springboard” events, beginning of September 2020. This was a difficult and expensive experiment, the technology was unproven and the registration process was complicated but the feedback has been phenomenal and OUPS will try to negotiate a way to make this possible to do again in the future.

Recordings

OUPS recognise the value of recordings and are continuing to investigate the options. However, there are significant challenges related to recordings: obtaining and maintaining permissions from tutors and attendees is problematic, as is copyright and distribution rights. As trustees of a registered charity, the OUPS committee need to ensure all the legal requirements are being met.

Structure

Regional structure

The regional structure as described in the OUPS Constitution is redundant. The Chair noted that the London & South region is the most active part of OUPS right now. The Cambridge group ran a few events in 2019 but has not operated this year given the pandemic.

Regional events

The Chair continued by reminding the meeting that OUPS have abandoned the regional model which required established committees (teams made of Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, bank accounts, etc). Instead, the London branch provided the administration support (handled

bookings and queries, paid tutors and venues, etc.) to enable local volunteers to run a number of events around the country over the last 18 months. The regional events have been met with mixed success: Glasgow and London events were successful, but Manchester, Plymouth and Cheltenham all made a financial loss due to very low attendance.

The Chair concluded that local face-to-face events will probably remain concentrated around London and Glasgow. But livestreaming will probably be a way to increase access to future events where the facilities make this possible.

Governance

OUPS did not have to do any work on policies and processes this year. However, previous efforts in this area have paid off and whenever necessary, OUPS have been able to show that it is operating as a well-managed society because many of the processes and procedures have been formalised.

The Chair ended his report by thanking the OUPS committee, tutors and all volunteers who helped arrange and run the events. The Chair also thanked all the members and students who have supported us over the year by attending our events, engaging with our Facebook pages, and taking the time to send us feedback.

3. Treasurer's Report

An extract of the Balance sheet from the finalised accounts is attached to these minutes. The full set of accounts will be available on the OUPS website and the Charity Commission website.

The Treasurer (Dr Alex Sandham) reported the society made a profit of £3,833. This was a big achievement after a financial loss of £18,406 in 2018. It was the first year, after the OU reduced their exams across the psychology degree to DE200 only, when OUPS were able to function at no financial losses. The small profit incurred is in line with the Charities Commission guidance for a charity of this size. The Treasurer wanted to highlight that OUPS were able to stop the financial losses because of the financial decisions made in previous years, such as: paperless events which saved on cost and have the added benefit of being more environmentally friendly; online only Newsletter; no tutoring fees for the tutors who were also elected members of the committee; reducing the number of volunteers present at residential weekend events; making the Business Administrator role redundant.

Financial decisions for 2020 follow the same line: minimum number of OUPS volunteers at residential events, tutors who are also elected members of the committee not being paid a tutoring fee, a move towards subsidised places rather than fully paid places at events, and cancelling the Barclaycard machine and using smart phone apps instead.

4. Adoption of Accounts

It was proposed that the meeting should approve the 2019 Accounts.

Proposed by: Dr Alex Sandham Seconded by: David Byrne

Accounts were approved by the members present.

5. Election of Officers and Executive Committee

The following candidates have been elected to the respective posts as Executive Officers and Ordinary Committee as they were the only candidates nominated so no further voting was required:

| <i>Role</i> | <i>Applicant</i> |
|--|-------------------------|
| Chair (Executive Officer) | David Byrne |
| Secretary (Executive Officer) | Amada Udres |
| Weekend Events Officer (Ordinary committee) | Evelyn Slavid |
| Student Support Officer (Ordinary committee) | Irene Baumgartl |
| OU Liaison Officer (Ordinary committee) | Abi Robbins |

6. Submitted motions

There were no submitted motions.

7. AOB

No AOB was raised.

The Chair thanked all those present and closed the meeting.

Close of meeting