

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF  
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
HELD AT WARWICK UNIVERSITY  
ON SATURDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2018**

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked those attending.

35 members were present at the meeting. All trustees were present at the meeting.

**1. Minutes of 2017 Annual General Meeting**

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting were accepted as a true record of proceedings.

**1.1. Matters arising**

None

**2. Chairperson's Report.**

The Chair started by outlining the overall changes in the education system and specifically in the Open University which happened during his first year as Chair of OUPS. The government announced the removal of subsidies from universities in England therefore the cost of studying increased considerably. This particularly affected the OU where many students used to study out of interest and enjoyment. Consequently, the university reported a 30% fall in student numbers between 2012 and 2017. This percentage was even higher in Psychology, the largest cohort in the university. This drop in numbers, along with the introduction of the new degree structure that removed most exams from the psychology degree (only two courses, DE200 and DD317, have exams) had a direct negative effect on OUPS. There was an immediate drop in numbers at all the module-related events.

The previous trustees had anticipated this and had built up a reserve fund on which the current trustees had to draw in these challenging times.

### **Financial review**

The Chair gave only a brief financial review as the Treasurer was going to expand on this later in the meeting. The Chair mentioned that the committee analysed the financial situation and took several decisions such as optimising committee costs for the events, removing the costs of printing and delivery for the event materials through the Paperless programme, reviewing the costs and locations of some regional events and for the first time, gaining financial support from the OU itself.

OUPS also trialled a number of new payment systems: online credit and debit card facilities for the first time, which proved to be popular, and savings and standing order schemes which were less used.

### **Faculty liaison**

The Chair briefly outlined the activity involving rebuilding the relationship with the OU and added the OU Liaison Officer was going to expand on the topic later in the meeting. The Chair noted the efforts put into creating a positive working frame with the OU by our faculty liaison team, headed by Abi Robbins. Immediate results were noted, such as faculty's help with the promotion of the society to all new students, plus support with the content of new modules and degree paths offered by the OU in order to better support our members.

### **Governance**

In the past year the society started the first significant overhaul of OUPS governance in many years, reviewing the Constitution (motions for change voted on later in the meeting) and introducing codes of conduct for the society and policies for equality, diversity and complaints management. This work will continue in the coming year.

OUPS also completed a six-month programme of work to ensure that our data protection and information security is ready for the introduction of the new GDPR data protection regulation in May 2018.

## **Regional structure**

Further on, the Chair talked about the regional structure. He observed that the current regional structure is idealistic but not fit for purpose as it relies completely on dedicated individuals to establish and keep a region open (such as North, London, Cambridge and the South/South East). He observed that the current structure actively prevents the society holding regional events in most places and therefore needs changing. The Chair announced there are plans of an event in Scotland for the first time in many years, and London, Cambridge and Brighton are offering various events in the coming months.

The Chair briefly mentioned that OUPS held our first event in partnership with the OU (London Postgraduate Seminar) and have a second arranged to run in parallel with “Thinking of Postgrad” weekend in Warwick, in September 2018. This will be a Research Showcase featuring a number of the research team at the OU presenting on their work.

The Chair ended by thanking the current committee (who are all volunteers) and the BA, for their energy and effort invested in the organisation and noted that OUPS could not function without people investing their time in this way.

## **3. Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer presented the draft accounts for the financial year 2017. The headline was a loss of £24,486. Same as in 2016, this loss was a direct result of the changes in the OU, such as very few exams in the psychology degrees, higher university fees, overall drop in student numbers – therefore OUPS also needs to change approach and need to understand where we fit in terms of supporting the students and amend our weekends accordingly. January 2018 weekend made a loss of £5,891 which was less than originally predicted.

In 2017/2018 the Committee made the following financial decisions: awarded 23 fully subsidised places across three weekends; introduced paperless events; reviewed September 2018 and January 2019 weekends and decided to offer them as a combination of old and new events – both weekends to be reviewed again after their presentation; reduced committee attendance in September 2018 and January 2019 – both weekends to be run with minimal numbers of committee and impact reviewed after presentation; prices to increase by £20 after September 2018; committee members who tutor at OUPS events not to be paid tutoring fees for one year, starting with January 2019 – to be reviewed after one year; LOUPS sourced smaller cheaper venues for their module focused events to match the lower demand.

A question was asked from the floor. One member asked why the committee accommodation expenditure is not itemised in the presentation. The Treasurer indicated this is itemised in the full Accounts report which is publicly available.

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.

#### **4. Adoption of Accounts:**

It was proposed that the meeting should approve the 2017 Accounts.

Proposed: Alex Sandham      Seconded: David Byrne

**Accounts were approved unanimously.**

#### **5. OU Liaison Officer report**

The OU Liaison Officer, Abi Robbins, started her presentation by stating it was a very good year in terms of establishing a positive working relationship with the Faculty of Psychology. This was a team effort, with both parts investing time and effort equally. Special thanks were given to Gini Harrison, Carole Barnett, Jean McAvoy and Troy Cooper. The OU Liaison Officer explained that her role grew from her past regular meetings with OUSA who facilitated the initial contact with the OU. This has allowed us to make the School more aware of what we can offer in terms of supporting student retention, satisfaction and community building. The first OU/OUPS meeting was held in September 2017 and there is now a regular timetable of meetings in place.

Further on, the OU Liaison Officer briefly summarised the progress made so far:

- The faculty actively promoting and endorsing OUPS in their news sections and also the new qualifications website which is accessible to all students studying any of the psychology qualifications – including students not based wholly in the School of Psychology.
- Planning to align OUPS and OU calendars so that OUPS do not schedule events that clash with school events.
- Exploring obtaining module team input for our events in the hope that the School will feel able to advertise our module specific events directly.
- Regular meetings timetable to be maintained.
- Significant benefits of the increased collaboration between OUPS and the School have already been realised, namely having OU speakers at some of our events (Prof John Dixon at the LOUPS Annual Conference, Prof Lisa Lazard at the Warwick January weekend. The School covered the costs of their visiting academics.
- In March at the Associate Lecturer Conference the AL's were both made aware of OUPS and also asked to support us.

- In April, OUPS were able to offer the first free event with partial funding from the School of Psychology and the Science faculty, who also provided the speakers. The event was organised by the London region and covered four OU Postgraduate Studies options; this was run on a registration only basis. With faculty and speakers' permission, audio recordings were made and the lectures will be made available for general download on the OUPS website. The aim is to be able to present more recordings in the future and explore further funding options.
- In September 2018, OUPS are proud to present an OU Research Showcase – with 6 confirmed speakers from the Faculty of Psychology who will present their current research behind the course material.
- There are plans for a day event led by the School of Psychology and organised by OUSA where OUPS were asked to contribute. This could potentially lead the way to co-organising events at Walton Hall.

The OU Liaison Officer finished her report by thanking the committee and the Chair for their continuous support.

## **6. Election of Officers and Executive Committee**

This year, there were no contested places for the committee therefore the following committee members were automatically elected.

Executive Committee Officers

**Chair:** David Byrne

**Vice Chair:** Dr. Alan Pechey

**Treasurer:** Dr. Alex Sandham

**Secretary:** Amada Udres

Ordinary Committee

**OU Liaison Officer:** Abi Robbins

**Event Design Officer:** Dr. Graham Edgar

**Weekend Officer:** Evelyn Slavid

**Newsletter Editor:** Lorna Rouse

**Books Officer:** David Clarke

## **7. Submitted motions**

The following motions were proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Treasurer:

Motion 1 – Committee and Trustees (please see document attached to these Minutes)

Motion 2 – Terms of membership (please see document attached to these Minutes)

Motion 3 – Terms of election (please see document attached to these Minutes)

All eligible members were invited to vote online, and 27 valid votes were counted. 15 members voted in person at the AGM, and these votes were added to the online ones by the Business Administrator, Irene Baumgartl, who also announced the results to the meeting.

The motions were carried forward:

Motion 1: 36 votes for  
2 against  
2 abstain

Motion 2: 35 votes for  
5 against  
1 abstain

Motion 3: 34 votes for  
4 against  
1 abstain

## **8. AOB**

Mr. Barry Morgan asked to present a list of ten ideas for the OUPS committee to consider. Mr. Morgan explained to the meeting that he felt compelled to offer his suggestions after OUPS cancelled the E219 Consolidation Weekend due to poor attendance. According to Mr. Morgan, E219 had 745 registered students which gave OUPS a 1% market penetration, with only 7 students having attended the study weekend. Mr. Morgan conducted a survey on the E219 Facebook group which he claimed pointed out the common reasons for non-attendance: students only heard about the event less than a month prior and students were not aware of the PayPlan scheme or of assisted places. Mr. Morgan concluded the committee's marketing effort was poor and, based on the ("modest") results of his survey, he offered the following suggestions.

- 1. OUPS committee to 'recruit' Facebook module groups admins by offering them discounts to OUPS events based on the number of attendees they recruit from Facebook, proposed amount was £5 per head. Admin to be responsible for posting messages prompted by OUPS.*

2. *Consider creating 'official' OUPS Facebook groups, possibly available only to OUPS members, with tutors present to moderate the risk of misinformation. The idea could then be presented to the OU Psychology department who could minimise costs by replacing their student forums with reliable Facebook groups.*
3. *Consider live video streaming OUPS lectures to students who are unable to attend in person. Proposed fee £10 per lecture.*
4. *Despite the "alleged copyright issues" and tutors' reluctance, record some of the video streamed lectures and make them available for download or via DVD for a proposed cost of £10 per lecture.*
5. *PayPlan scheme has the advantage of bringing in early bookings and lower charges as direct bank payments are cheaper than PayPal and credit cards. However, it is too rigid, such as the PayPlan for January 2019 opens and closes on the same day 1<sup>st</sup> July. The scheme needs to be more flexible by offering 3, 4 or six months payment plans, plus the ability to access it later and catch up on payments.*

The Chair interrupted Mr. Morgan to clarify for the meeting that the information about the January 2019 PayPlan was inaccurate. The scheme was not available for one day only, the first payment had to be made on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. PayPlan scheme opens in the same time when the event gets published and is available to book online. He added that 70% of the bookings are made in the month prior to the event. Also, the payments spreading for 3, 4, 6 months etc requires a great amount of admin work which OUPS do not have the staff for. One member also added that she did not find the information online confusing, it was all very clear and she had sufficient time to arrange payments with her bank (one month notice).

Another member added that she found Mr. Morgan's stance to be aggressive and with no real benefit to the meeting and the committee as it was not inviting constructive discussions. She added she felt that Mr. Morgan was 'ordering people around'. Mr. Morgan stated his stance was not aggressive and asked to be allowed to continue.

6. *Advise students that the preferred payment options are direct bank transfers or PayPlan in order to save on the cost of the PayPal and credit cards fees (According to Mr Morgan's figures "in 2016, PayPal fees were 2.9% of the revenue").*
7. *Assisted places to be offered at a 50% discount and not free. Give some examples of how a student might qualify for these places. Allocate places according to rules instead of assessing each on a case-by-case basis as now.*
8. *Extend invitations to general OUPS events to other universities, such as LOUPS Social Psychology conference which could have been sold to LSE students and a bigger room could have been booked to cater for higher numbers. Consider live streaming such events to regional hubs (i.e. Manchester, Leeds, Edinburgh) and invite the 'native' students.*
9. *Revisit the prices of Warwick weekends, such as the £50 discount for non-residential places which seems very low. Also, the difference in price of £11 between an en-suite student room and a hotel style room is very low. Consider discounts for students who are friends and willing to share a room.*
10. *Make the events friendlier for new attendees. Mr Morgan observed that the committee gave attendees the feeling of being in an out-group by using what he sees as 'high tables' at OUPS events for the committee, giving "attendees the feeling of an 'in-group". He noted that new attendees are customers who need to be nurtured and encouraged to attend again, claimed that all successful companies ensure that their*

*directors sit at tables with 'normal' staff and said he found it shocking that such behaviour occurs within a psychology organisation.*

Mr. Morgan ended his presentation by offering the committee a number of hard copies with his ideas.

Mr Simon Stephens of Addictions UK described a proposal for his organisation to jointly fund a section on the OUPS website where relevant papers could be published and discussed. Each organisation would then promote the other to raise the profile of each. The Chair agreed to discuss the matter further with Mr Stephens.

Another matter in AOB was raised by a member who wanted to state that although expensive, her experience is that OUPS events are good value for the price charged.

OUPS Vice President, Dr. Richard Stevens congratulated the committee for having gone through a tough year with some difficult decisions that had to be made.

No other matters were raised.

The Chair thanked all those present and closed the meeting.

Close of meeting