

## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Central Executive Committee (CEC)

25 – 27 October 2019

### REMITTS REVIEW

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The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **discuss** the proposed combining of roles and new role
- ii) **discuss** the suggested other changes
- iii) **approve** a finally agreed list of roles
- iv) **approve** other suggested high level changes

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 In July's CEC meeting, members were asked to email me their thoughts about their own remits and CEC roles generally. The staff team were also asked to do this. At the meeting, a process of wider consultation (with Trustees, CCRs, SRG and the wider student body) was also discussed
- 1.2 In the light of the varied feedback received, I decided it would make more sense to bring initial proposals back to CEC to firm up before taking them out more widely. This paper contains these initial proposals for the remits 2020-22
- 1.3 The focus herein is principally on the larger scale changes and matters of general principle; the intent is that details can be finalised on the forum.
- 1.4 The existing remits, and a summary of the feedback received, are attached as appendices 1 and 2 respectively. Appendix 3 contains suggested outline remits for new roles

#### 2. Proposed Combining of Roles I

- 2.1 There are relatively small numbers of students in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) (approximately 1000) compared to Northern Ireland (3700), Wales (9000) and Scotland (16500)
- 2.2 The Open University run their operations in the Republic of Ireland from the Northern Ireland office.
- 2.3 It is therefore proposed that the Association follow the approach of the OU in Ireland and appoint a single AAR for Ireland.

2.4 Given RoI is in the European Union, it may also be appropriate for the AAR for Continental Europe to advise on matters relating to the RoI on occasions.

### 3. Proposed Combining of Roles II

3.1 Two new roles were introduced to the CEC for the 2018-20 term. These were VP Media and Campaigns, and VP Student Voice

3.2 For context - during the Remits Review in the 2016-18 term, discussions had been had about abolition of the roles that might be regarded as predecessors to these – namely VP Communications and VP Representation and Research. Views were split on this, and the new roles evolved in an attempt to breathe new life into remits that had not generally been regarded to work that well.

3.3 Media is largely an operational function, meaning much of the work relating to this naturally sits with the Office; all reps will also naturally use media Campaigns are naturally something that sit within the area related to the campaign, rather than being a discrete strategic responsibility. Student Voice should be part of almost every remit.

3.4 It is suggested, therefore, to replace these two roles with **VP Student Communications and Engagement** which prioritises awareness and engagement. The role would provide oversight, coordination and a 360° view of these two key areas.

### 4. Proposed New Role

4.1 The remits review in the 2016-18 term opted to remove the role of FAR for the Open Programme, suggesting instead that the Faculty FARs could provide support for students from the Open Programme studying in their Faculty.

4.2 Whilst support on module-specific issues naturally does sit with the corresponding FAR, it has become increasingly apparent that there are other non-module specific issues that affect students on the Open Programme, and whilst I think we have done our best to address those, I have been very aware that it would have been easy to let these slip

4.3 It has also become apparent that we can be rather disconnected from another key areas of the OU's provision – the Access programme. The needs of Access students can be quite distinct, and additionally, the OU is looking at reviewing and expanding this provision. In the OU itself, oversight of Access does not sit principally within faculties.

4.4 It is therefore suggested that the role of **Open and Access FAR** be created.

4.5 A further suggestion is that this proposed role could also cover matters related to general provision for new students, such as induction

### 5. CEC Size

5.1 Some feedback suggested a reduction in size of the CEC, but this was not a majority view. The proposals above would result in a reduction by one.

- 5.2 It is worth noting that a substantial change in composition would not in any case be possible this year, since it would require a constitutional change to, for example, remove categories of representatives.

## **6. Missing Areas**

- 6.1 Some suggestions have been received that we should consider including roles with specifically responsibility for given minority groups, or for apprentices. My take is that VP Equality and Diversity (in liaison with our Groups) covers the first, and that the second are covered by their respective FARs. Is this fair? (And if so, does it need to be specified in writing?) Are there any other key areas missing?

## **7. Nature and Purpose of Remit Descriptions**

- 7.1 The remit descriptions have two main purposes – informing potential candidates for election, and making the roles and responsibilities clear to the post-holder. They may also be used by members wishing to hold their representatives to account, or seeking help from them.

- 7.2 My take is that the informing potential candidates is a key function, and that with this in mind it could be helpful to include in the election documents, in some cases, a brief summary of “desirable” experience. This could be along the lines of:

For President and Deputy President: Candidates for these roles would normally have served previously on the Central Executive Committee  
For VP Education Candidates for this role would normally have served previously as a Central Committee Representative

This would not preclude candidates without this experience from standing but would help inform potential candidates’ decisions.

## **8. Openness to All**

- 8.1 Almost all CEC roles are carried out by volunteers. Volunteers typically have employment and/or caring responsibilities and/or other calls on their time.

- 8.2 Many roles now are effectively incompatible with a conventional working pattern. Whilst in some cases that is probably unavoidable (hence the salaried nature of President and Deputy President roles), it is important to prevent “mission creep” with this extending ever further, and also to make what adjustments we can to ensure elected office remains accessible to the 75% of OU students who are in paid employment

- 8.3 I suggest therefore that we make some currently *ex officio* aspects of certain roles optional, with the elected post-holder specifying whether or not they wish to take them up. This could include, for example, Faculty Assembly and SRG membership for FARs, and some of the multitude of committees VP Education is on being made optional.

The roles not taken up could be allocated to other CEC or CCR volunteers

- 8.4 We should also recognise that volunteers may have times when they are less available and so they may need to rely on their fellow elected reps to provide some cover. Whilst this certainly happens currently, building it into the description could have the advantage of making it easier for affected reps to ask for help.

## 9. Cross-CEC Functions

- 9.1 Many CEC members find themselves spending significant amounts of time on work that is not specific to their remit, but nonetheless is very important for the CEC generally. As in 8.4 above, they may also find themselves covering for their fellow reps on some occasions

I suggest that the presence of such work is highlighted much more prominently in the role descriptions, to make it clear that being a CEC member is about more than just one's own remit, but rather involves being part of a team.

## 10. Flexibility

- 10.1 Individual postholders will inevitably have their own interests, strengths and areas for development. Whilst obviously particular roles do need some core responsibilities assigned, I think there is a case for focusing on high level descriptions rather than specifying full detail in all cases
- 10.2 This could include letting membership of particular groups be agreed between appropriate post-holders – for example some *ex officio* roles could be specified as being associated with one of a number of post-holders, such as Education Committee being designated to be “President or Deputy President or nominee”

## 11. Other Proposed Key Changes

- 11.1 Student Experience Committee is a key mid-tier committee and does not have an *ex officio* CEC member on it. I suggest that the membership of SEC is revised to specify President or Deputy President or nominee, alongside a CCR.
- 11.2 The Student Member of Council would be in a difficult position carrying out their role if they were not a member of Senate. I suggest therefore that they become an *ex officio* member of Senate alongside President and VP Education. Ideally this would be as an additional student Senate member (Associate Lecturers have seven members, so requesting seven students would not seem unreasonable). However, failing this, they could replace the current “President’s nominee” role.
- 11.3 Some FARs have suggested that an *ex officio* position on their Teaching Committee would be preferable to their current one on Faculty Assembly. I suggest that the choice of the two should be offered to the post-holder.
- 11.4 Given the previous President did not wish to serve as Chair of OUSET, I suggest this is removed from the President’s remit (notwithstanding the current incumbent would be very keen to serve as Chair of OUSET !)
- 11.5 Removing the very specific link between AARs and VP Community. This link made sense if AARs played a purely community role, but this is just one aspect

of the role. Clearly they will need to work with VP Community, but not exclusively. This also seems to me a relic of the days when there was a division of the CEC into “Officers and others”

11.6 Make use of social media a requirement for all student-facing roles

**Cath Brown**  
**President**