

CEC Effectiveness Review August 2021

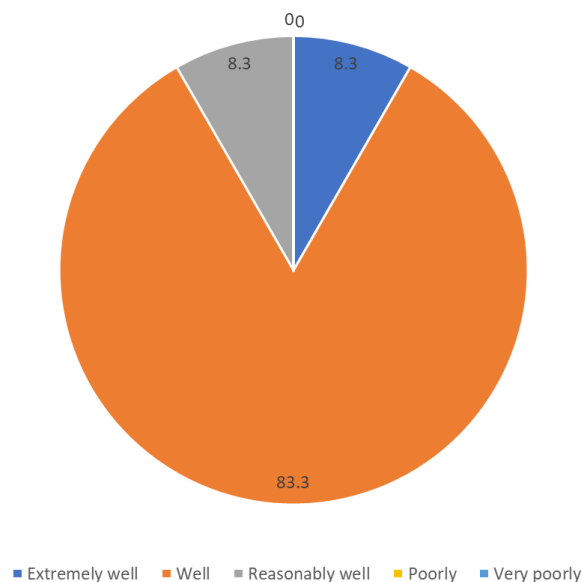
The CEC Effectiveness Review was held throughout July and August 2021. 12 CEC members fed into the survey.

1. Role Remits

1.1 The majority of CEC members heard about their role via word of mouth. Only a third of CEC members voted for alternative options of either 'other' or the oustudents.com website.

1.2 The remits on the whole, have matched the CEC members role with 83.3% selecting 'well', 8.3% selecting 'extremely well' and 8.3% choosing reasonably well.

How closely has your remit matched your role so far?



1.3 When asked whether the expectation of their time required for the role, has matched with the actual time spent on the role, an overwhelming percentage (66.7%) chose either in excess of the time I expected to spend or is far in excess of my time expectation. A common theme amongst comments was that the time listed in the role remits was inaccurate, with CEC members spending way more time than originally stated in the remit. One individuals stated that *'whilst i could complete the core elements of my role within the stated hours, to really advance the role, additional time is required'*. Another supported this claim acknowledging that *'it may be possible to do less hours however this would mean sticking to the role description, performing just adequately and not playing a full part in general CEC matters'*.

1.4 It became clear from the comments, the importance of stating a realistic time expectation on the role remits, so individuals who take on the role are not surprised by how much time is occupied doing their role. One person stated the need to be *'absolutely honest with new members about the time expected to take in role'*. They

detailed the consequences of not doing so: *'we lose good people at all levels because we greatly underplay the actual commitment'*.

Has your expectation of the time required for your role matched with your actual time?

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- Matches my expected time very well
- Matches the time I expected to spend
- Nearly matches the time I expected
- Is in excess of the time I expected to spend
- Is far in excess of my time expectation



Areas for discussion

- **Should roles be split into categories eg for those who have more time and those who don't? In the hope it would reduce CEC turnover**

Recommendations for Remit review

- **Remits should accurately display the amount of hours required to carry out the role**

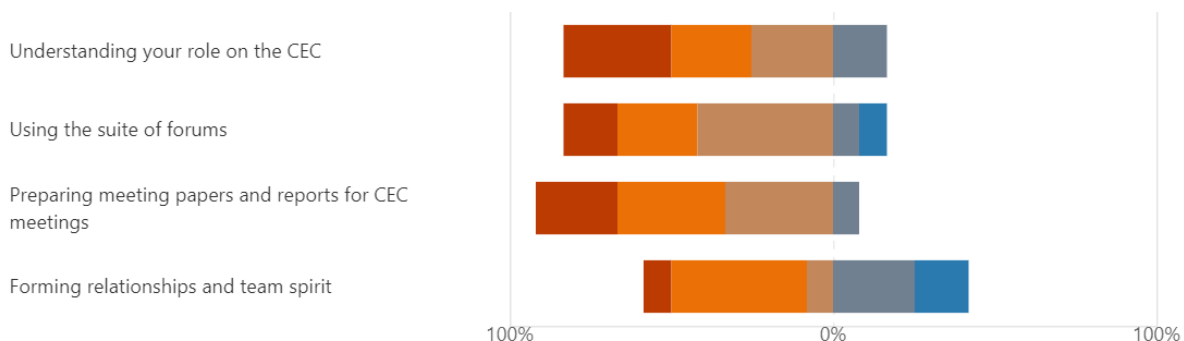
2. Handover and Induction

2.1 The handover and induction weekend proved to be beneficial in helping CEC members understand their role on the CEC, with only 16.7% selecting not well. The remaining 83.3% selected either extremely well, well or reasonably well.

How well did the handover and induction weekends help you with

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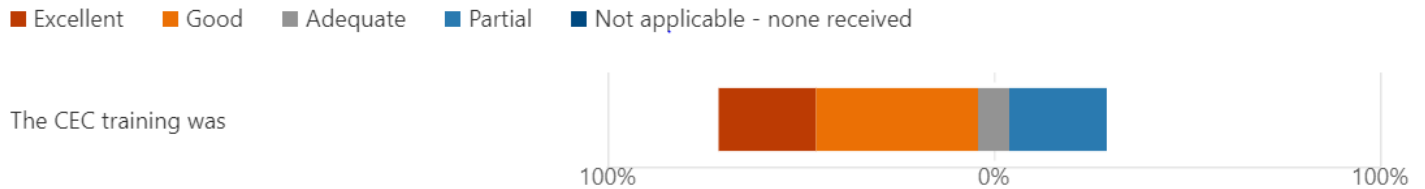
- Extremely well
- Well
- Reasonably well
- Not well
- Not prepared at all well
- Not applicable - didn't attend



2.2 Similar results were seen in relation to how did the handover and induction weekends help with using the forums and preparing meeting papers and reports for CEC meetings. The responses to whether handover helped with forming relationships and team spirit was not overwhelmingly positive with 25% selecting 'not

well'. Despite this, 50% of CEC members did say the handover and induction weekend helped with forming relationships and team spirit well or extremely well.

2.3 The training received at Handover was mostly positive with 66.7% selecting 'good' or 'excellent'. A quarter of respondents selected 'partial'.



Recommendations for future training at handover included learning about membership of OU committees as one respondent found it confusing at first, an induction on how to use Teams effectively and the accessibility it can provide, how to chair meetings and how to navigate difficult situations. Responses also recognised a need for a proper handover for those who are elected in a by-election. Finally, a few respondents suggested role-specific training would benefit CEC members, rather than more general training to suit all.

Recommendations for Handover/Induction weekends

- **Being clear about membership of OU committees**
- **Introduction to using Teams effectively**
- **Role specific training such as how to chair meetings and how to navigate difficult conversations**
- **Ensure a proper handover for those elected in by-election**

3. CEC Meetings

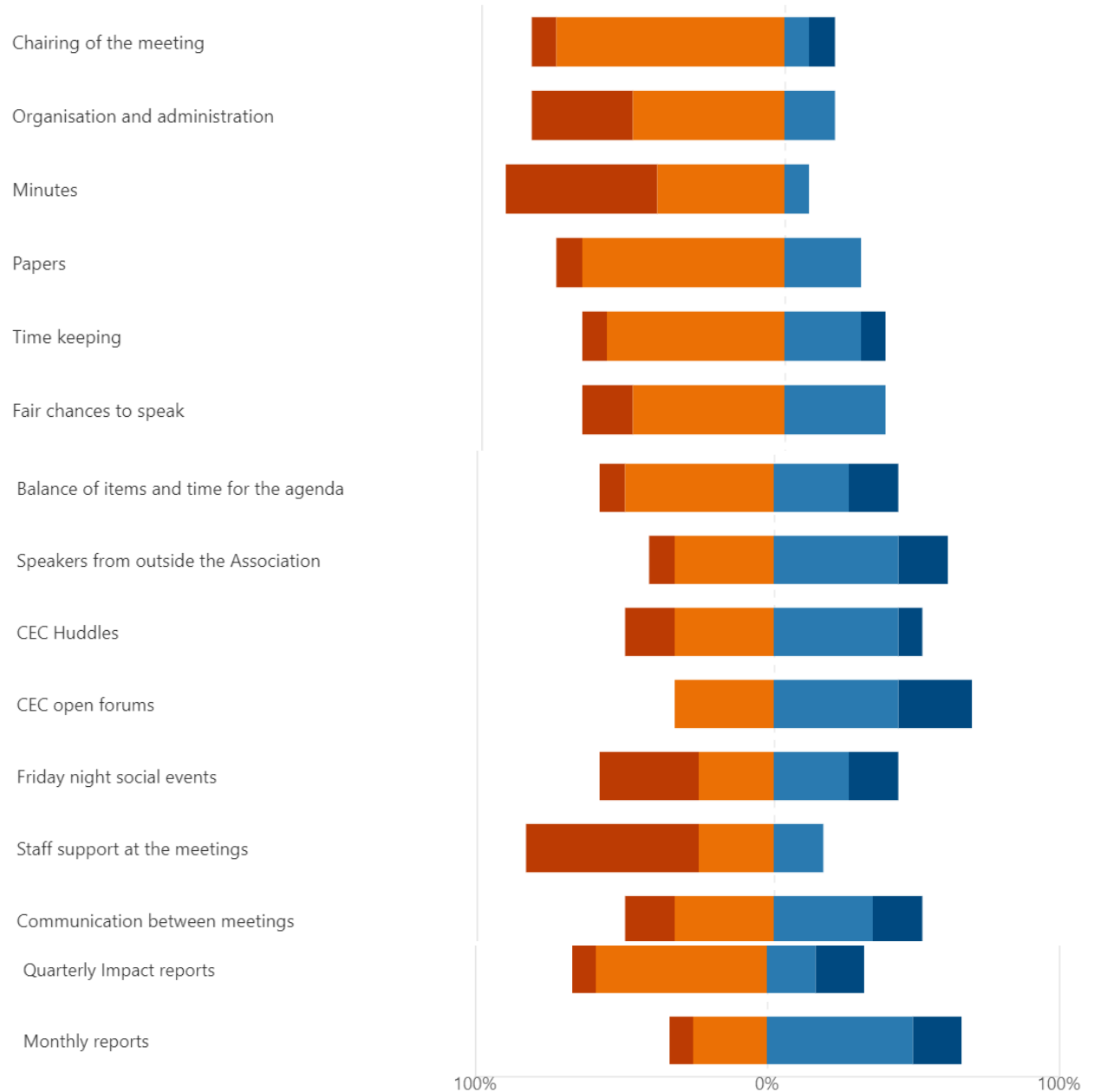
3.1 The CEC forums were used fairly often with 10 out of 12 respondents selecting that they either regularly input in discussions or regularly post to receive comments on the forums. Just 2 respondents outlined that they occasionally visit the CEC forums, with no one selecting 'rarely used' or 'never used'.

3.2 When asked to rate different aspects of the CEC meetings, chairing of the meeting, organisation and administration of the meeting, the minutes, papers and time keeping all had overwhelmingly positive responses. Areas which received a mixed response included the speakers at the CEC meetings, CEC Huddles, CEC open forums, Friday night social events and monthly reports.

4. Thinking about the CEC meetings, how would you rate the following?

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■ Excellent ■ Good ■ Average ■ Poor



3.3 The CEC open forums had 33.3% finding them 'good', 41.7% saying 'average' and 25% selecting 'poor'. Some comments were positive, with one respondent acknowledging that *'they are a good opportunity to be candid'*, and then went on to say they were *'dissapointed to see this missing on the most recent CEC meeting'*. However, on the contrary, *'open forums are not working as they turn into a slanging match'*, with another respondent stating *'CEC open forum is not a good place to be'*. Similar views were felt with the CEC Huddles with a few respondents outlining that

they are working less well than they used to. Likewise, others noted a need for better participation in the Huddles and greater engagement.

3.4 Further concerns were raised with regard to CEC papers. One respondent explained that there is simply *'too many reports, both to read and prepare – we are not full time'*. The length and amount of papers was raised a few times, with individuals recognising that *'not all members have capacity to read all the reports'*.

3.5 Another concern surrounding CEC papers, was the minimal amount of CEC papers that are written and brought to CEC by CEC members themselves, with the majority coming from Association staff. One individual stated *'some members will go their whole term not having a single CEC paper to bring to the meeting and they just do their own thing without wanting input from anyone'*. It was clear that discussing the important business is often overlooked, as *'there is a tendency to get bugged down on details rather than focusing on the big picture, the strategic approach we should be focusing on'*. The small negativities of the paper such as grammatical errors was also raised as an issue.

3.6 The speakers from outside the Association also produced mixed opinions, with the latter (58.4%) voting for either 'average' or 'poor'. Whilst there were no comments in regard to the speakers themselves or what the preferable option would be, one respondent commented that there is an imbalance of training/guest speakers vs CEC business, with training taking priority, resulting in weekends being quite intense. Contradictory, one responded stated that activities and interactions are *'too focused on Association business and not so much on team building'*.

3.7 During the height of the Covid pandemic, there was a move from the suite of forums to the Teams forums. CEC members were asked for their thoughts on this move. Results from this question proved a near 50:50 split with CEC members either really liking Teams or hating it; there was no resounding opinion. Some CEC members found the move positive - *'it makes it clearer where things are and following threads is much easier than the VLE forums. There are more opportunities to input into documents as a collective as well'*. Furthermore, another respondent stated their preference for the Teams forums as *'it is more dynamic and interactive...it also appears to enable us to keep track of work (bar the fact that channels rotate conversations/updates, as that can be disorientating when several conversations are happening in tandem'*. They also appreciated the *'visible aids such as emojis and gifs, as these help to personalise and break up the cold and often desolate online working space'*. Additional comments included *'much better and so much more functionality and engagement'* and *'very positive experience, much more user friendly and interactive for collaboration'*.

3.8 On the flip side, negative comments focused on the confusion that the move has caused with one respondent stating *'bad move, appallingly done'*. One member found conversations hard to follow, explaining *'I lose track of conversations too easily and comments get amended with zero update notifications. Teams is not great at all on team building or networking'*. One individual felt neutral about Teams, outlining that *'both have advantages and disadvantages'*.

3.9 Several changes were made to the format of the CEC weekend and how it functions, due to Covid. Respondents were first asked to rate the Friday night CEC social. A mixed response was received; extremely good (25%), good (16.7%), fairly good (25%), not good (16.7%) and really not good (16.7%). Explanations relating to this illustrated *'online socials are poor as people can't talk freely due to set up of meeting spaces'* and they *'simply don't work'*.

3.10 Discussing the information papers on the forum and only discussing the discussion papers in the online meeting similarly presented a near 50:50 split, with 41.6% selecting either 'extremely good' or 'good', 16.7% selecting 'fairly good' and 41.7% choosing 'not good'. The negative reaction to this approach is exemplified by *'online forum discussions allow for a large amount of passiveness with few people commenting, often just noting the papers. I can't help but feel more discussion might be triggered verbally'*. Additionally, the disadvantages of forum discussions were made clear; *'any forum discussion is slow and unnatural compared to face to face'*. The extra time generated through only discussing the discussion papers at the online meeting was however, seen positively by some CEC members. One respondent answered *'having more discussion time in the meetings has worked better and if more people inputted on papers then the discussion would be better, getting to the meat of the discussion'*. There were further comments, outlining a need for more papers to generate more thorough discussions: *'I would welcome more papers from people so we could spend most of the time discussing big picture things'*. The lack of papers and discussion about them was a concern felt by many: *'it would be good to see more input across the board from all members of the CEC'*.

3.11 Further issues raised regarding the new online meeting format included:

'Disparity in equipment and Internet connections can make meetings hard to follow, online meeting etiquette really needs revisiting and enforcing... two people open mics at same time nothing can be heard I have stopped talking much at any meeting as can't gauge when other people intend to speak'

'online meetings obviously prevent networking and the option to get to know each other better'

'Emotional intelligence and picking up social cues can sometimes go a rift in online meetings, especially when a rep has had some time away with difficulties or if a rep is being less talkative or visible in meetings; perhaps it's simply in my case and others are in fact being noticed by their CEC peers and staff, and are being supported adequately (still, I must express this is not always the case, well not from staff perspective at least, as I do (rarely) get approached by staff to check I'm ok, when things seem off with me). In a face to face context, things have been easier to spot and quieter are more encouraged and nurtured to join in on conversations (at least by one or two more confident people who sit in close proximity, which helps to break the ice/silence), so, that's something I see not being done as effectively'

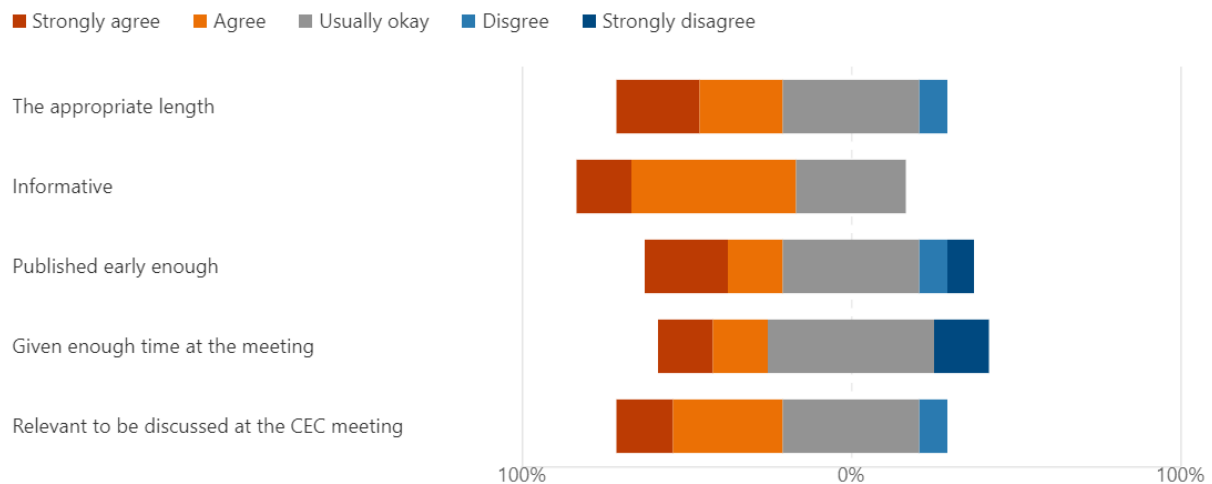
'There is no dedicated "CEC time" for the weekend as it was in the face to face setting, some reps do not make any contribution to the discussions'

'There is a risk of things being rushed through online, without proper debate/scrutiny'

3.12 Respondents were then asked to what extent they agree that the CEC papers are the appropriate length, informative, published early enough, given enough time at the meeting and relevant to be discussed at the CEC meeting.

}. To what extent do you agree that the CEC papers are

[More Details](#)



3.13 The majority of respondents found the papers informative, with 66.7% selecting either ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ and 33.3% selecting ‘usually okay’. Similar trends were seen with the appropriate length; 50% choosing ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’, 41.7% selecting usually okay and only 8.3% disagreeing. Further results demonstrated that papers need to be given a bit more time at the meeting as 16.7% opted for strongly disagree and 50% choosing ‘usually okay’. These statistics are supported through the statement *‘sometimes more time is needed for specific papers to be discussed without rushing things’*.

3.14 These mixed responses were replicated for whether papers were published early enough. 41.7% selected strongly agree or agree, 41.7% choosing ‘usually okay’ and 16.6% opted for disagree or strongly disagree. Those who receive the printed papers seemed to have a negative experience. One respondent stated *‘getting papers has been a nightmare, the last lot came on the Wednesday afternoon. Nowhere near enough time to read and feel able to contribute effectively’*. To provide context, this late arrival can happen if there is a second mailing. Papers in the second mailing are published on the Friday before CEC and the print room only operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Consequently, the earliest date for printed papers to be printed and sent is the Tuesday of the CEC weekend.

3.15 The majority of CEC felt they were able to contribute at CEC meetings, with just 16.7% not always able to contribute as freely as they would like and 8.3% selecting *‘I don’t feel I am able to contribute to most CEC meetings’*. One respondent explained that the rush to get through the business, results in an inability to contribute in the meetings. They stated *‘I never really feel I could contribute as freely as I might like because we are constantly reminded we have set times and we need to be quick with our points as there’s an agenda of business to get through and a set timeline, so*

there's not always time for me to re-engage my thoughts, let alone get my points out properly'.

3.16 Comments suggested that there is an inconsistency in the CEC papers and those presenting them: *'some papers/topics are good, and some are too long. Some members speak (too much) and some not enough'*. Another respondent supported this claim that there's a *'lack of time and lack of being able to make everyone stick to the point'*. This can have negative effects as stated *'I lose focus easily when a speaker does not stick to the point and just waffles'*. An improvement for the meeting was outlined in relation to this: *'force everyone to stick to the point!'*. Overall, there was a general feeling that online meetings can be difficult, and it has both benefits and drawbacks.

3.17 When CEC members were asked to detail barriers, they have faced in CEC meetings, there was a clear theme that negativity felt in the meetings is a real barrier with one respondent stating that *'negative voices seem to be the loudest'*. This was supported by another comment: *'sometimes the tension in the room from CEC members who do not want to work with each other has made it hard to engage with everyone – even online that is felt'*. Additionally, another respondent described that *'there is constant negativity from a small group of people, it feels like anything said will be instantly judged'*. They did however, go on to say, *'most people are very positive and supportive, but the small but loud negativity is very distracting'*. It is this negativity which could be preventing the quieter members of CEC from contributing at meetings.

3.18 CEC members were then asked what could be done to improve the CEC meetings. Half of all respondents stated that CEC meetings could be improved by going back to a face-to-face setting. One respondent outlined a need for face to face in order to *'regenerate team spirit and cooperation'*.

3.19 Sticking to timings and allowing a greater length of time for detailed papers was suggested as an improvement: *'a review of what needs to be discussed at CEC meetings would allow for a shorter agenda with more in-depth discussion...it often feels like items are there for the sake of being there and updates could be presented at different times, leaving CEC weekend discussions for more in-depth discussions'*. In addition to this, a few respondents highlighted a need for CEC to focus on the information in the papers, rather than minute incorrections: *'remind everyone to start looking at the good we do and start leading rather than nit-picking over papers'*. This comment mirrors another where a respondent stated *'be stricter on focusing on the big picture over details'*.

3.20 A final statement explained that CEC meetings could be improved by *'having an expectation that everyone needs to join in and come in with a positive attitude ready to get to the meat of any discussion'*.

Areas for discussion

- **Do you want open forums? Do they cause more harm than good?**
- **Is it necessary to set a page limit so everyone is able to read all the papers and it isn't unmanageable?**

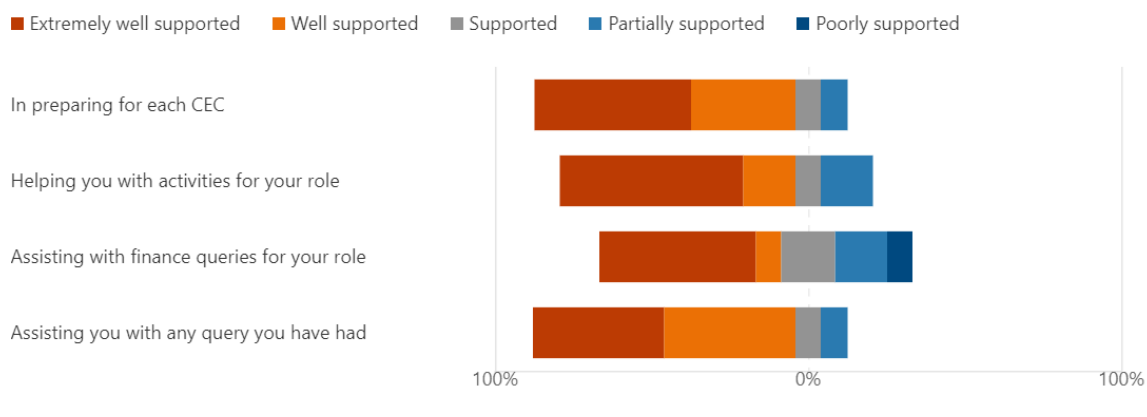
- How could CEC members be encouraged to write their own CEC papers for discussion?
- What kind of speakers would you like at CEC meetings?
- Do you want to continue with Teams instead of the forums? Should we try provide training on this so everyone feels comfortable using it?
- Would you rather the CEC socials become just a space to chat or do you like the activities eg. Quizzes?
- Do you want to keep information papers on the forums? If not, there will have to be understanding that the weekends will be longer and busier
- Is there a need for a team building/open discussion to air negativity in the group?

4. Training and Support

4.1 The majority of CEC felt extremely well supported in all aspects of their role; in preparing for each CEC (83.3% selected extremely well supported or well supported), helping with activities for their role (75% chose extremely well supported or well supported), assisting with finance queries for their role (58.3% voted extremely well supported or well supported) and finally, assisting with any general query resulted in an overwhelmingly positive result, with 83.4% voting extremely well supported or well supported.

. How have you found the support from the Association staff in your first year?

[More Details](#)



The area where CEC felt they had the least amount of support was with finance queries.

4.2 When asked how they would improve the support for your role, there were some really positive responses surrounding the current support, with different respondents explaining, *'I have been extremely well supported by everyone!!!'* and another outlining *'the staff support has been second to none and I am really grateful for all the support I have received across the board'*. One respondent emphasised that they have been *'very well supported so far to deliver projects'* and demonstrated that

support has been lots better than in the previous term. For some CEC members, there are *'no complaints, just continue'*.

4.3 On the contrary, constructive feedback was given surrounding different aspects of support. There were no real trends here. Respondents stated:

'I feel that I am really well supported in my role, but in isolation only. I feel that cross role support and engagement would ultimately benefit all CEC members'

'at least monthly catch ups'

'a full history of past interactions, readily available/accessible with OU committees (in particular)'

'there could be more help with making introductions to staff at the very beginning of a role'

'Pre-meeting check-ins (for less confident or anxious reps like me) to assess preparedness, ability to participate or just to offer reassurance (particularly in big meetings like CEC, SRG, OU committees). I feel like there's an undercurrent expectation that all reps (who have been put into a role, or who volunteer to participate in a role) are always fully prepared or clear on what's being asked of them; which isn't always the case'

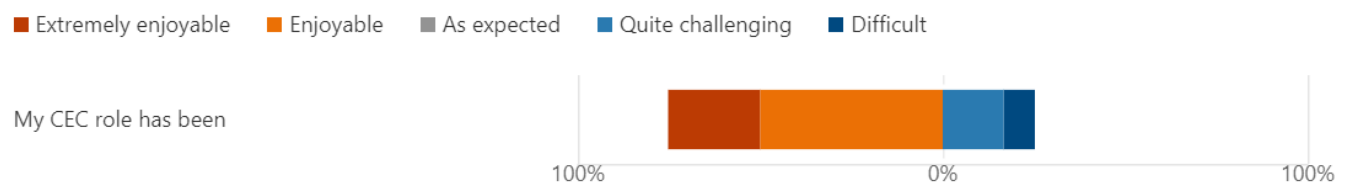
'Listening more to the points I am trying to make and stop acting like the Association is more important than the students it represents'

'at times it can feel like priorities are within the team already and supporting the CEC member is a 'side thing' not the focus of the team'

4.4 Overall, CEC members have found their role enjoyable (25% finding it extremely enjoyable, 50% enjoyable, 16.7% have found their role quite challenging and 8.3% have found it difficult).

i. How have you found your first year on the CEC?

[More Details](#)



4.5 Responses to the question of 'How can we help you in your role over the next year' followed similar trends. A few respondents focused on the level of support: *'increase opportunities for support by having regular catch ups'*; *'continue to support'*; *'deep listening, continuing to support pastorally'*. One respondent stated that they think it is now up to themselves to ask for help when they feel it is required as *'help is available if needed'*.

4.6 Other respondents focused on training, particularly a need for role specific training. This was supported by another individual who stated a need for *'training in a timely fashion in areas required for the role'*.

4.7 Finally, some comments recognised a need for better team spirit and an involvement from all CEC members. One CEC member explained that staff need to *'call out the CEC members who are not cooperating or pulling their weight'*. Additionally, another CEC member wanted staff to *'encourage everyone to jump in with both feet and really get stuck in'*. A need for proactivity was apparent. A further respondent clarified that they *'have loved working with everyone, but we need to do better at not allowing personal grievances to get in the way of professionally working together'*.

Areas for discussion

- **How can all CEC be encouraged to get involved?**
- **How could you feel better supported when it comes to finance queries?**

Recommendations for further training and support

- **Monthly catch ups with staff contacts**
- **Introductory 'Meet the Staff team' zoom session for new CEC members**
- **Pre-meeting check ins**
- **Role-specific training offered**

5. Overall experience so far and looking forward to the year ahead

5.1 The majority of CEC members (8/12) felt part of the student community. Only 3 people said they didn't feel part of it and one respondent opted for 'other'.

. As a volunteer with the Association, do you feel part of the student community?

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● Yes	8
● No	3
● Other	1



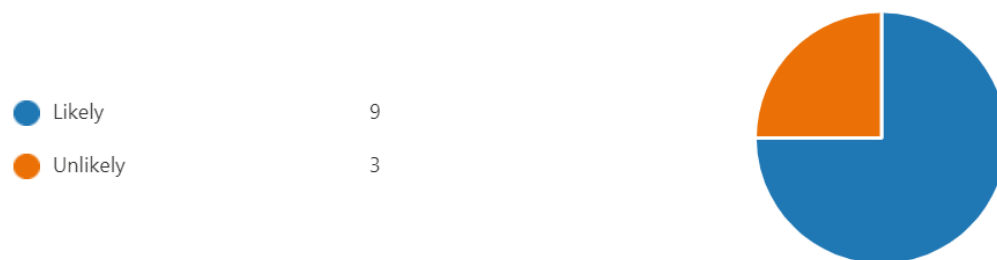
5.2 A respondent outlined that they do feel part of the Association community *'but there is still a substantial absence of community sense with the student body at large'* which is *'the inevitable consequence of the OU's inability/failure to engender a true student community'*. This lack of community amongst the student body was portrayed in another comment which stated *'as a volunteer I feel a part of the student community when in OU meetings, not so much when I'm in student spaces'*. They explained that *'students have a misconception that volunteers are workers for the*

OU and so different to them...getting them to see and value us (as both students and volunteers) is a hard balance'. One CEC member outlined the difficulty of trying to maintain being part of the student community as 'it becomes very challenging to find time for 'just students' when our roles are so busy'.

5.3 When asked whether they would volunteer with the Association following their CEC term ending, 9 CEC members (75%) voted for likely and 3 voted for unlikely (25%).

How likely is it that you would volunteer with the Students Association again once your CEC term comes to an end next year?

[More Details](#)



5.4 One respondent outlined a need for an 'undecided' option as an answer to this question, as the options listed pressured them to choose one or the other when they are not sure what they would do next.

5.5 The survey concluded with an option to add any other comments. A few responses focused on the underlying tensions amongst this terms' CEC and the problems it causes as a consequence. This is seen in the following:

'Whilst I have really enjoyed my individual role on the CEC, I am very disappointed and concerned about the underlying tensions and occasional individualistic viewpoints within the CEC, including from myself, and how this is inhibiting any attempts to fulfil a One team approach. This is having a knock of effect in how the CEC appears outside of ourselves too. Whilst I am confident speaking to any other CEC when needed, there is very limited coordinated approaches taken to work as a cross role team'.

'The CEC team are a turbulent bunch and I really want to get to a point very soon where we are working together to move forward the Governance review and engage with as many students as possible in our 50th year'.

5.6 On a more positive note, a respondent stated, *'I have really appreciated Sarah's leadership and being welcomed by most CEC members and the incredible support and protecting our time from staff'.*

Recommendations for general CEC related matters

- **Put on a meeting/open discussion so air can be cleared between CEC members who are experiencing underlying tensions**

- **Have quarterly team building exercises to bring all the CEC together and increase collaboration and team spirit**