

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)

8 – 10 October 2021

CEC EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW ANALYSIS

The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **Receive** the analysis
- ii) **Note** the recommendations and discuss areas for improvement

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 The CEC effectiveness review survey was held in July and August. Twelve CEC members completed the survey and provided valuable responses. The purpose of this review is to recognise areas which are working well for the CEC and identify areas which require further improvement or changes.

2. Findings/Recommendations

2.1 Role Remits

2.1.1 Responses in regard to role remits, discovered that 66.7% of CEC members spent a far greater amount of time on their role than they expected. A common theme found was that the time expectations on the role remits were inaccurate, subsequently in some cases, causing CEC members to resign.

2.1.2 It is therefore recommended that remits need to be reviewed, so they accurately display the number of hours required to carry out the role.

2.1.3 It could be necessary to split roles into categories, for example, for those who have more time and those who have less time.

2.2 Handover and Induction

2.2.1 Handover weekend proved to be beneficial in helping CEC members understand their role on the CEC, with 83.3% selecting either extremely well, well or reasonably well.

- 2.2.2 Similar results were seen in relation to how the handover and induction weekends helped with using the forums and preparing meeting papers and reports for CEC meetings. The responses to whether the weekends helped with forming relationships and team spirit were more negative with 25% voting for 'not well' and 16.7% opting for 'not at all well'.
- 2.2.3 The training received at handover was mostly positive (66.7% selecting 'good' or 'excellent').
- 2.2.4 Recommendations for handover and Induction weekends included an introduction to Teams; role-specific training; handover weekends for those elected in a by-election and being clear about membership of OU committees.

2.3 CEC Meetings

- 2.3.1 The CEC forums were used often by CEC members with 10 out of 12 respondents selecting that they either regularly input in discussions or regularly post to receive comments.
- 2.3.2 When asked to rate different aspects of the CEC meetings, chairing of the meeting, organisation and administration of the meeting, the minutes, papers, time keeping, and staff support at the meetings received positive responses. Areas that received a higher proportion of negative responses were speakers at the CEC meetings, CEC huddles, CEC open forums, Friday night socials and monthly reports.
- 2.3.3 Concerns raised about CEC meetings, focused on the vast number of papers CEC have to read before the meeting, the minimal number of papers which are written by CEC members (with the majority coming from staff), the negativity and lack of cohesion and team spirit amongst this term's CEC, the short space of time to discuss business items causing discussions to be rushed and lastly the current online situation.
- 2.3.4 During the height of the Covid 19 pandemic, a few changes were made in regard to the format of CEC weekends. Firstly, there was a move from the suite of forums to Teams. The responses to how CEC have found this move proved a near equal split with half enjoying Teams and the other half disliking Teams and preferring the suite of forums. Respondents were then asked how they have found the online CEC Friday night events where a mixed response was received (extremely good (25%), good (16.7%), fairly good (25%), not good (16.7%) and really not good (16.7%)).
- 2.3.5 Discussing the information papers on the forums and only discussing the discussion items in the meeting also presented a mixed response, with 41.6% selecting either 'extremely good' or 'good', 16.7% selecting 'fairly good' and 41.7% choosing not good. Comments suggested that the negative response is due to the minimal level of discussion on the forums, with a belief that face to face generates greater discussion.
- 2.3.6 The majority of respondents found the CEC papers informative, the right length and relevant to be discussed at the meetings. However, 'usually okay' was the most common answer in response to all aspects of the papers. Responses to whether CEC papers are published early enough and given

enough time at the meetings received a greater percentage of mediocre and negative responses (41.7% opted for usually okay, 16.6% opted for disagree or strongly disagree in regard to published early enough; 50% voted usually okay and 16.7% selected strongly disagree for whether papers are given enough time at the meetings).

- 2.3.7 Overall comments regarding the CEC meetings highlighted two major trends; a desire for meetings to return back to face to face and a need for negativity and underlying tensions amongst CEC members to stop, in order to create a more positive and collaborative environment.
- 2.3.8 There are many areas of discussion highlighted on the bottom of page 8, in relation to the improvement of CEC meetings. These include whether open forums are required, what speakers you would like to present at meetings, what the preference is for CEC social etc.

2.4 Training and Support

- 2.4.1 A vast majority of CEC felt extremely well supported by staff 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.
- 2.4.2 Recommendations to improve support from staff to CEC members included having monthly catch ups with their staff contact, pre-meeting check-ins, better introductions to meet the Association staff and information about OU committees being more readily available.
- 2.4.3 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). Responses to the question 'How can we help you in your role over the next year?' generated mixed replies; some surrounded a continuation of current support with some monthly catch ups as well, others explained a need for role-specific training and finally, there was a trend in responses surrounding a better team spirit and greater involvement from all the CEC.

2.5 Overall experience so far and looking forward to the year ahead

- 2.5.1 8 out of 12 respondents felt part of the student community, with 3 people saying they didn't feel part of it. Further comments contextualised the results, suggesting that it is easier to feel part of the Association community than it is to feel part of the wider OU student body community. Others explained that it is difficult to be a part of the student body because they are simply too busy in their role, so consequently have less time to engage with other students.
- 2.5.2 75% of respondents said it would be likely they would volunteer with Students Association again once their CEC term was over.

2.5.3 When asked for general comments about their CEC experience, many respondents pointed to the constant underlying tensions and negativity in the group, which is causing a lack of collaboration and also results in negative perceptions from an external perspective. It was clear throughout this survey that these issues need to be resolved and with priority, in order for the CEC to be most proactive in being the voice for OU students.

3. Next Steps

3.1 I am asking the CEC to prioritise the aspects of the CEC they would like to change immediately and the recommendations they would like to adopt. Once these have been collectively decided, the changes will come into effect by the December CEC.

3.2 I would like to thank everyone who gave up their time to complete the survey. The results have been so insightful and will hopefully improve the CEC for the better.

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