



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
17 – 29 April 2020
MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 17 – 29 April 2020 and via Adobe Connect on 25 April 2020

PRESENT

Cath Brown – President (Chair)
Patrice Belton - Faculty Association Representative Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)
Mark Cameron - Area Association Representative Scotland
Caroline Cowan – Vice President Administration
Amelia Gackowska – Vice President Student Voice
Sarah Jones – Faculty Association Representative Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)
Michail Kasoutas – Area Association Representative Continental Europe (part)
Alison Kingan – Vice President Student Support
Matt Porterfield - Faculty Association Representative Business & Law (FBL)
Wendy Reid – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland
Lucy Richardson – Area Association Representative Wales
Anca Seaton – Vice President Community
Danielle Smith – Area Association Representative England
Barbara Tarling – Student OU Council Member
Fanni Zombor – Vice President Media and Campaigns

IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Avann – Chief Executive
Gabriella Cull – Executive Support Assistant
Kate Dungate – Head of Digital Communications (part)
Alison Lunn – Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources)
Leah McDougall – Digital Communications Optimisation Officer (part)
Beth Metcalf – Head of Student Volunteering (part)
Leanne Quanton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (minutes)

<p>INTRODUCTORY ITEMS</p>

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the April 2020 meeting. Because of the Covid-19 restrictions in place, this meeting had been held via the online forums and on Adobe Connect.

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B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cherry Day – VP Equality & Diversity
Billy Docherty – Faculty Association Representative Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)

C. MINUTES

C.1 Following minor changes notified in the forum, the minutes of the last meeting (CEC 01/20/M) were approved.

D. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

D.1 None raised.

<p style="text-align: center;">SECTION A: ITEMS FOR APPROVAL AND REPORT Taken on the Forum Meeting between 17 – 29 April 2020</p>
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1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE **CEC 04/20/1**

1.1 The Scotland AAR added to his report to advise that an additional forum had been set up for the NUS Scotland Think Positive work for all staff and students involved to discuss and share ideas around supporting students during the current pandemic. The Scotland AAR will be sharing the work that the Association is doing to support its students during this time.

1.2 VP Student Support reported an accessibility issue for screen readers when reading dates in number format and advised that the preferred way would be to format dates in the: 1 Feb 2020 format.

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS **CEC 04/20/2**

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES **CEC 04/20/3**

3.1 The FBL FAR commented that the position was much better overall although raised concern that the Law Society had not submitted accounts or a set of minutes to their members since 2018. VP Administration confirmed detail regarding Societies not meeting their affiliation requirements was included in the Bye-Law revisions. VP Community added that she is contacting those societies who have accounts remaining outstanding.

4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT **CEC 04/20/4**

4.1 The FBL FAR queried the possibility of the OU demanding back unspent Conference costs as they are for unspent pension contributions. The Deputy Chief Executive

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(Finance & Resources) clarified that the OU clawback was for funding provided for pension increases that ended up not being as high as had previously been forecast, therefore it was a one-off arrangement with the OU for this reason only and she did not anticipate a clawback for any other reason.

- 4.2 He went on to query the overall subvention amount and whether the Association is in negotiations regarding the fact that the amount committed by the OU for the forthcoming year was less than had been requested. The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) advised that a meeting had been requested with the Vice-Chancellor and PVC Students for us to further explain the bid and to gain clarity over whether the response is a short-term reduction or whether it represents a new normal going forward. There remain several options that the BoT can consider if there remains no movement on this amount from the OU which includes using some of the anticipated underspends from this year and/or some of the exam paper replacement income. It will be important for Trustees to balance spending plans that are in the interests of student members with their responsibility to ensure future resilience and sustainability through the reserves policy.
- 4.3 The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) explained the change in the tax position for the President, advising that the role was considered as home-based but due to the proportion of time spent on campus, RSM, our external HR advisors, advised that HMRC would regard travel and accommodation costs as taxable expenses. This additional spend had been included in the subvention.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 17 – 29 April 2020

- 5. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT** **CEC 04/20/5**
- 5.1 The CEC noted the concerns regarding increasing workload due to OU departments increasingly coming to the Association to source student volunteers for events and feedback. There were comments made around ensuring a balance of making sure that the student voice is heard across the OU whilst monitoring volunteer capacity. The President highlighted the importance of student involvement and that partnership working continues but to ensure that it is not the same volunteers being asked and that increasing the size of the volunteer pool was key. The Head of Volunteering posted a list of the OU events and testing/reviews that the OU had sought students to attend over the last year, which had increased compared to the previous years. She felt that is was a positive, however, it did affect student capacity therefore it was important to weigh up what was prioritised and to identify what attending will do to further the Association's strategy.
- 6. CONFERENCE 2020** **CEC 04/20/6**
- 6.1 A query was raised as to whether those with an automatic place needed to register as part of the ballot. The Conference Project Manager confirmed that would not be the

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case, but that everyone will need to complete the second form around facilitation.

- 6.2 VP Student Voice was in favour of the idea of extending the business voting period and to incentivise participation but also highlighted the risks of people clicking through just to get to other activities. She recommended making the business as attractive as possible and detailing the importance of this section to get students engaged. Other members also voiced their concern over incentivising students. VP Student Support queried whether there was a way for making activities available for the wider student body and giving those the choice about taking part in the business to ensure that only those that took an interest in business needed to attend and letting others attend other activities. The FBL FAR and the President both felt that this would be hard to administer and reiterated the importance of the business and the requirement for a quorum of 40% of Conference attendees to vote.
- 6.3 Early reports showed that the number of people registering to attend would easily fill the total spaces of 500 available and a ballot draw would be needed.

7. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES **CEC 04/20/7**

- 7.1 The regular report from the BoT was posted for CEC to note. The Chief Executive gave further information on the proposed governance review, one of the recommendations that had come out of the culture review. The Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) is working on an invitation to tender for external consultants to deliver this piece of work. Further updates will be given when available.
- 7.2 VP Media & Campaigns questioned the reasons behind not looking at other student unions in terms of the Data Protection Officer Services and it was clarified that this had been explored and that other SUs were in the same situation as the Association in that some are using their institutions' providers but others have had to commission external services.

8. STRATEGY 2020-23 **CEC 04/20/8**

- 8.1 The CEC congratulated on the great work being done and workstreams progressing, despite the current difficult circumstances.
- 8.2 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator gave an update on the responses of the Annual Membership Survey that had been launched to a representative sample of 30,000 students in March and had received 292 responses (just under 1%). A 3% response rate target had been set but unfortunately, the timings and initial challenges in getting the OU to support the team in carrying out the survey worked against them. The survey was not able to be sent to the full membership as first intended and the delay in timings meant that less promotion was carried out to avoid competing with our own messaging on elections and then the additional comms around the COVID-19 situation.
- 8.3 Whilst the response rate for this soft launch was in line with other surveys the Association had carried out, it was hoped that with better promotion and incentive, the 3% target will be reached when the full membership is contacted in the Autumn.

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- 8.5 Part of the analysis will be to compare the geodemographic profile of responders with the student body profile. Early findings showed that 65% of the responders were in the 25-34 age group (vs 61% in this age range in the representative sample) and the team will work with the full findings in the Autumn to analyse across all the variables to see where there may be under- or over-representation in the responses.
- 8.6 The Research Team are currently working through the data analysis and will be shared with the CEC in due course.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Taken on 25 April via Adobe Connect

9. BYE-LAWS

CEC 04/20/9

- 9.1 A number of changes had been made to the Bye-Laws following Stone King recommending changes in July 2019 to align the Bye-Laws with the Articles of Association after Incorporation. Since then, further changes were agreed at the October 2019 and January 2020 CEC meetings as well as others proposed by the President, VP Admin, and the staff team which had been incorporated into the revised document for CEC comments.
- 9.2 Lengthy discussion was had on both the forum and at the CEC meeting and a number of comments and changes were made. The move to removing certain areas of the Bye-Laws to separate policies i.e. the Travel and Subsistence Policy and Election Rules was raised. The CEC agreed with this approach which meant keeping the key elements in the Bye-Laws while making the document more manageable and giving greater ease of access for students as well as freedom to make any alterations when required.
- 9.3 It was highlighted that the Bye-Laws still referred to 'Officers' on the CEC although this term was no longer used by the CEC because the hierarchical element had been removed. The Chief Executive confirmed that Association Officers was still a defined term used in the Articles of Association, therefore, this change would need to be made in 2022 during rules revision and then the Bye-Laws could follow accordingly if this was agreed. The CEC agreed with this approach.
- 9.4 The draft version proposed a process for removing an Honorary Life Member (HLM) which the CEC agreed was a requirement. If there was a breach of the code of conduct by an HLM their status should be able to be removed and the code of conduct and disciplinary procedure should be applied as necessary.
- 9.5 The content of the Conference section had been updated in section 6.15 to require activities to be aligned with the Association's strategic objectives. It was queried whether stipulating that business should be allocated to at least half a day in the Bye-Laws was necessary or whether this could be left open allowing greater flexibility. The CEC agreed for the point to remain to ensure the importance of business was reflected in the time allocated for it.

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- 9.6 It was agreed to change the wording in 7.1 regarding the Nations to 'The Association's recognised nations and regions will be agreed from time to time by the Central Executive Committee in line with the Articles. The Association currently recognises England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Continental Europe as representative areas with direct representation on the Central Executive Committee and the Rest of the World as a region without direct representation'.
- 9.7 It was agreed that the Position Statements created by the CEC during their term should be submitted to Conference for their information as an appendix to the main CEC report included in the business documents.
- 9.8 The draft included the addition of the failure of a Society to submit their annual accounts which would result in their affiliation being suspended until compliance was restored. The CEC thought that there should be some flexibility depending on the reason and circumstances of a Society and support should always be given in the first instance. The wording was to be amended to reflect this.
- 9.9 Other changes included removing references to specific names of Groups to allow for more freedom in adding or making changes to existing Groups. The CEC wanted to revise the wording in the Conference section to allow for the venue to be changed if it were ever required.
- 9.10 It was agreed from the discussion following the other paper on the agenda (paper 11 on covering CEC vacancies) that additional wording was to be added around Co-option and Deputising.
- 9.11 ACTION:** Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) to collate feedback into a final draft and post onto the forum for any further comment. Post-meeting note: the CEC provided further feedback on a final revised draft which was also simultaneously presented to the Board of Trustees and approved by both the CEC and BoT.

10. NEW VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

CEC 04/20/10

- 10.1 Beth Metcalf, Head of Volunteering, and the President introduced the paper that proposed two volunteer roles that would provide different support and engagement opportunities for students, Student Experience Links and Students Association Ambassadors (or a name to be agreed). Both roles had previously been piloted (titled then, Learner Experience Reporters/Representatives and Community Champions) with a range of success but following the work undertaken in creating the Association Strategy, it was thought lessons could be learnt and improvements made to both roles to provide greater engagement and a valuable opportunity to students.
- 10.2 The Student Experience Links role would work closely with Central Committee Reps, Faculty Association Reps and other student reps as appropriate to support student voice activities, seeking student opinion and current issues and feeding back. The second role, Student Association Ambassadors would support the community work but also act as a pool of trained and engaged students to support the Association's mission in creating a sense of community and support a range of Association and OU events such as student research opportunities, freshers and Adobe Connect drop-ins.

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- 10.3 The CEC welcomed the review and the return of the roles. The importance of the feedback loop was raised for the Student Experience Links and having clear communications channels to ensure information was fed back to the correct people. It was felt important to have these in place as soon as possible, especially as some of the Faculty Association Representatives positions had not been filled in the recent elections for the 2020-22 term, therefore, making this role even more vital to collect knowledge and information. A suggestion was made for a forum or Slack channel that all FARs, CCRs, and staff can access, for these role holders to feed in and ensure comments are picked up and actioned accordingly.
- 10.4 It was thought that the opportunities that were available for the ambassador role would be advertised, allowing volunteers to select the activities that they wanted to be involved with. This would enable the role to be as big or as little as a volunteer chooses. VP Community suggested that being part of the online forums and Facebook groups could be an activity for these volunteers, to liven up these spaces and engaging students in conversations.
- 10.5 The CEC were unsure of the name of this community role as the OU also uses the term Student Ambassador.
- 10.6 ACTION:** The CEC to discuss the role name and finalise the role descriptions in the forum.

10.7 RESOLUTION: The CEC approved both roles

11. COVERING CEC VACANCIES & SUPPORTING POST-HOLDERS **CEC 01/20/11**

- 11.1 The President and Chief Executive introduced the paper that outlined options to consider in covering CEC vacancies and supporting post-holders if additional workloads were put on them through absence or vacancy in the team. Over the course of this term, there had been a number of vacancies on the Central Executive Committee and concern had been raised by the Board of Trustees to ensure the wellbeing and the right support was available for the CEC. The BoT had requested the Chief Executive and the President to develop proposals on how this situation might be managed and approached for future circumstances. The paper presented options and appraised each, inviting discussion on next steps.
- 11.2 Three potential options were discussed: Co-option, Volunteer Panels, and Deputising. The Chief Executive drew attention to the issues to consider around all options, namely around fairness and legitimacy which should be taken into account before any decision is made. The fact that other CEC members would be in their posts and performing their roles having won an election to do so, whereas co-optees and deputies would not have come through the same route would need to be carefully thought through.
- 11.3 The CEC discussed the three options in turn. Co-option did raise issues around ensuring the correct safeguarding procedures were followed as well as legitimacy in any co-optee not having been elected. A discussion was had around what roles co-option could work for and it was agreed that this should be assessed on a case by

case basis as roles are so varied. The CEC agreed that the duration of any co-option should be limited to up until the next available by-election. There was agreement that the co-option decision process should be transparent and involve members of the BoT as well as CEC. It was felt that the best route might be to open the role up as a volunteer opportunity, following the usual process with these but with a clear panel to select the co-optee. Several members expressed concerns over legitimacy where full voting rights were concerned, however, a majority vote approved that a co-opted member should have full voting rights on the CEC with this to be reviewed by future CECs. It was also agreed that roles could be broken down and mixed ways of cover could be implemented depending on role duties.

- 11.4 Volunteer Panels to support role holders were then discussed and it was noted that the proposal was similar to the pilot currently being run by the Wales AAR in the Wales Volunteer Panel, which had been set up to support the AAR in their remit. It was thought that a panel should support the duties of a post-holder and be a way to acquire the expertise to cover aspects of roles, much like Senate Reference Group does for the six members of Senate. There was concern over a panel undermining a role and the danger of it creating additional workload to manage. It was agreed that any panel would need clear terms of reference and parameters to make it work.
- 11.5 RESOLUTION:** It was agreed to wait for the results of the Wales Volunteer Panel pilot before making a decision. The next CEC would need to review this in time.
- 11.6 The CEC then commented on the proposal for Deputies, which currently does already take place if a member cannot attend a CEC Meeting. The CEC were happy in principle with the proposal but agreed that it needed formalising and clear parameters established. It was thought that deputising should be done on an ad-hoc basis as a one-off substitute rather than for a long amount of time. It was agreed in principle that a deputy would have voting rights; that it could be used for all CEC remits and with an understanding that there are some aspects of certain roles that deputies could not be used e.g. for the OU Council member in attending Council meetings.
- 11.7 RESOLUTION:** It was agreed that the Chair (the President) should approve any deputising arrangements, with individual post-holders able to nominate someone to cover for them subject to the President's approval.
- 11.8 ACTION:** Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) to propose amendments to the Bye-Laws and continue the discussion in the forum.

12. WEBSITE PROVIDERS

CEC 04/20/12

- 12.1 This item was of a confidential nature and has therefore been reserved to the confidential section of the minutes.

<p>SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE</p>
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13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

13.1 Alternative Formats: Liz Marr, PVC Students, attended part of the meeting to talk about alternative formats and the work being done to improve the current procedures and systems. PVC Students stated that there had been failures in ensuring that some students had received the alternative formats that they required for their studies which had been unacceptable. The reasons for this had been down to old systems designed for smaller student numbers not being able to meet the demand for a larger student population and the increase in alternative formats required. A huge amount of work is being done to improve the system to ensure that students' needs are being met, however, the CEC were warned that this was a detailed, complicated process that would take time and would not be completely resolved for the 20J presentation. However, it was stated that the system would be much improved in the long term. Liz ran through the number of workstreams created for the project:

- Business Process Analysis, which was mapping the existing process and working on development and recommendations for the quality assurance process and approach.
- Management Information, who are creating a new dashboard tool that will predict and track demand for printed packs and materials as well as being able to track progress on delivery of mailings.
- Supporting Evidence workstream, to ensure that the right support is given to students.
- Enabling Enquirers & Students, which is making sure that students have the right materials/equipment that they need for their studies and supporting them in their studies.
- Automatic Rendering of Structured Content - a big piece of work in upgrading the system from the automatic standard process that creates 'other formats' of student module.
- Production Overview.
- Communications and Engagement, that will improve communications to students and staff.

An update report is going to the Vice Chancellors Executive (VCE) at each meeting.

13.2 The CEC had several comments and questions that PVC Students took away. These included ensuring that relevant tutors were being advised if delays occurred on their modules that meant their students did not get materials in time, in order to be better able to support those students where relevant. There was assurance that requesting additional evidence from students would not delay the process but was to ensure that the correct support would be given and that personal records were up to date. The CEC fed back on the Guiding Principles. Comments had already been taken on board from the AL Executive and Heads of Schools. PVC Students will take back the comments made and asked the CEC to forward any other thoughts or issues directly to her to investigate. She apologised to the CEC for the issues in the past and re-assured members that the team are working hard to ensure that improvements are made.

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13.3 FASS FAR Resignation: The CEC formally thanked Billy Docherty, the FASS FAR following the receipt of his resignation.

13.4 OSL Director: The CEC agreed for the President to substitute for the now vacant Deputy President as a Director for OSL until the end of the term.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

14.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the Handover Weekend of 17 – 19 July 2020.