



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
9 April – 20 April 2021**

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 9 April – 20 April 2021 and via Microsoft Teams on 17 April 2021.

PRESENT

Ian Cheyne – Deputy President
Lorena Fontan-Grana - Area Association Representative (AAR) for Wales
Elyse Hocking – Area Association Representative (AAR) for Scotland
Gareth Jones - Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Business & Law (FBL)
Sarah Jones – President (Chair)
Alison Kingan - Vice President Student Support
Katie MacFarlane – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Science, Technology and Maths (STEM)
Cinnomen McGuigan – Vice President Education
Matt Porterfield - Vice President Administration
Lucy Richardson – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Open and Access
Verity Saunders – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)
Anca Seaton - Vice President Community
Bev Smit – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)
Danielle Smith – Student Member of Council
Fanni Zombor - Vice President Engagement

IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Avann – Chief Executive
Megan Brown – DSG Observer (except 15)
Gabiella Cull – Executive Support Assistant (minutes)
Magda Hadrys – Head of Operations (part)
Alison Lunn – Head of Finance and Resources
Sue Maccabe – Strategy Change and Projects Coordinator (part)
Beth Metcalf – Director of Membership Services
Ellie Milnes-Smith – Staff Observer (except 15)
Dan Moloney – Director of Engagement
Verity Robinson – Head of Student Support

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the April 2021 meeting and gave a special welcome to the student observer from the DSG and to a new staff member, Ellie, who were both in attendance observing their first CEC meeting.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Patrice Belton - Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Marius Kondrotas– Area Association Representative (AAR) for Ireland

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 01/21/M) were approved.

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

D.1 None raised.

SECTION A: ITEMS FOR APPROVAL AND REPORT Taken on the Forum Meeting between 9 April – 20 April 2021

1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CEC 04/21/1

- 1.1 There was a lot of discussion in the forums over the inclusion of blank reports when a CEC member has not submitted a report. The overall conclusion was that the Association needs to be more open and transparent with its students but there were contradictory opinions on whether including them or not including them is fitting with this desire to increase transparency.
- 1.2 One CEC member stated that she was unable to receive the reports, questioning the format and whether they fulfilled their purpose. She requested further discussions on the format of these reports as she explained that they restrict what CEC members can report to students.
- 1.3 The FBL FAR developed on a point made in the Wales AAR's quarterly impact report. He stated that following further thinking, he felt that the Association should explore a relationship with the National Union of Students Wales (NUSW) to keep up the Association's profile in this area. The Wales AAR confirmed that she has always been keen for the Association to be part of the NUSW but it wasn't enthusiastically received

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by the Association itself. She queried whether she should keep pushing for this partnership, particularly as the OU in Wales (OUiW) seem keen to develop this. The FBL FAR suggested further exploration on this. The Open FAR confirmed that to be part of NUSW, it would require the Association to affiliate. In the past, the Association has pursued a close working relationship with the NUSW instead. She stated that several Welsh Universities do the same.

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS **CEC 04/21/2**

- 2.1 All CEC members noted a comprehensive report submitted by the Chair of OU Pride. They found it really encouraging to see the improvement since their last reports and asked for special recognition to be given to the Chair for their hard work in putting such a detailed report together. The Student Member of Council also acknowledged the great work going on within OU Pride and the fantastic efforts made by the new committee to promote the group and create a really engaging and informative space for LGBTQ+ students. She looks forward to hearing more about their work.

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES **CEC 04/21/3**

- 3.1 VP Engagement found it reassuring to see the actual issues outlined with each of the societies and the action plans in place to tackle the concerns and equip them with further support. The Student Member of Council was glad to see the work happening to bring all societies up to date and supporting those who need it. She recognised that where societies are disengaged, suspension is the appropriate way forward.

4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT **CEC 04/21/4**

- 4.1 One CEC member felt able to only partly receive the finance report due to accessibility difficulties reading a part of the paper.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 16 – 26 January 2021

5. RECEIVED: BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT **CEC 04/21/5**

- 5.1 A couple of CEC members explained that they were unaware two members of staff had left, which was outlined in the report. Since these comments were made, the Chief Executive has sent a reminder out to the Management Team to keep CEC updated on staff resignations and new starters in the Teams space. By doing so, the CEC will be kept up to date with staffing changes and should be aware of everything going on.

6. RECEIVED: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION WORKING GROUP UPDATE **CEC 04/21/6**

- 6.1 A couple of CEC members pointed out that some projects still had a staff member's name against them who had recently left the Association. The Head of Student

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Support confirmed that the information against the projects is like a status report, so although this member of staff was mentioned, it does not mean that they were projects that he was looking after, just that he had performed that action at the time.

- 6.2 VP Student Support was glad to see the work being initiated and looks forward to seeing how it progresses. She questioned whether the EDI Working Group should be reviewing the information that the Association presents, and whether it is fully accessible, including the website.

7. RECEIVED: FRESHERS FORTNIGHT EVALUATION REPORT CEC 04/21/7

- 7.1 The CEC found this report very interesting and it was well-received.

8. RECEIVED: WEBSITE UPDATE CEC 04/21/8

- 8.1 The Student Member of Council thanked everyone involved in this work. She recognised the long process it has taken to get to where we are now and appreciated that there is still a way to go.

9. RECEIVED: EVALUATION OF WALES STUDENT VOLUNTEER PANEL CEC 04/21/9

- 9.1 As someone previously involved in the Wales Volunteer Panel, the FBL FAR looked forward to seeing any recommendations that the working group make. The President also expressed her support of the panel and stated that with the learning put into place, this could be a real asset and another way for students to volunteer.
- 9.2 The Wales AAR outlined her concerns surrounding the panel. She highlighted that there is not enough workload for a panel and so she queried the purpose for it. Additionally, she explained that with new volunteering opportunities coming up such as the micro-volunteers, if volunteers are needed as they could be pulled from this pool that already exists. She emphasised that this would create a wider range of student voices. The FBL FAR acknowledged that he too shared similar concerns.
- 9.3 VP Engagement outlined her concerns with regards to the roll out of this panel, particularly as there were many issues which arose as a result of the pilot panel. She would like to see much clearer role descriptions and a clearer scope to approve the roll out. She also looked forward to seeing the recommendations from the Working Group.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Taken on 17 April via Microsoft Teams

10. STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT CEC 04/21/10

- 10.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator introduced the performance report which gives updates on the Key Performance Indicators, the fourteen projects in the

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strategy projects portfolio and the staff team business plans. She outlined areas where the metrics are currently showing positive trends; new and returning visitors to the Hoot, social media engagement, membership levels for Clubs, Societies and Groups, Peer Support and Library Support Users and active volunteering roles and new volunteers. Following this, she outlined the areas where metrics are currently reflecting up and down swings; shop orders and average order values, and newsletter sign ups and engagement. Areas where the metrics are currently reflecting downward trends are video views, Totum card registrations and Togetherall new registrations.

- 10.2 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator illustrated that project 15 has been newly created to look at our communications. This project will be an enabler of the strategy and Marcomms plan. She went on to recognise project 4 which will focus on mapping the student journey which will be running in a few weeks' time. Expressions of interest for this project are open, for either a project lead or general involvement. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator welcomed any comments or questions from the CEC.
- 10.3 The FBL FAR recognised that the positive and downward trends are both expected. He stated that the decrease in Totum sales is unsurprising, as as other student discount websites such as UniDays and StudentBeans are becoming much more popular than Totum due to there being no payment to access these discounts. He expected a reduction in Totum sales as time goes on.
- 10.4 The Student Member of Council was in agreement with the FBL FAR and recognised that the impact of the pandemic can't be underestimated in areas such as the OU Students Shop. She was pleased to see that despite many complications that have been caused by the pandemic, work and the projects have continued to progress. She expressed interest in participating with project 4.
- 10.5 VP Student Support questioned whether reports on usage of 'Togetherall' could be included in this report. She explained that it would be interesting to see a report on how different ethnicities engage with the service. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator agreed that a usage report would be beneficial and received a contact from VP Student Support on who can provide these usage reports. VP Student Support thanked the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator for her substantial efforts on making the Strategy performance Report accessible to read.
- 10.6 The Director of Membership Services noted an increase in the click through and open rate. She suggested it would be good to see a comparison with the sector average. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator confirmed that the next stage is to look at benchmarking and making sure it is relevant for making comparisons. There is also scope for setting targets in the foreseeable future.
- 10.7 VP Community noted the increase in numbers of students engaging with the website and social media and was pleased to see Freshers Fortnight influenced/impacted this. She explained that the period after Freshers is the perfect time to promote new events. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator agreed with VP Community, outlining that we need to harness this 'Freshers energy' by creating a plan for what to promote during this post-freshers period, in order to maintain and maximise such high levels of engagement and excitement.

10.8 The Deputy President raised concern over the lack of analytics produced from the current website. VP Engagement confirmed that with the new and improved website, we will have access to far greater statistics/analytics than we do now. She highlighted how beneficial these statistics will be for mapping the student journey.

10.9 RESOLUTION: the CEC received the Strategy Performance Report and thanked the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator for all her hard work on this.

11. DEVELOPING POSITION STATEMENTS

CEC 04/21/11

11.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator put forward this paper in order for the CEC to review and discuss the suggested positions generated from the workshops, and to agree the priority areas for which position statements are to be developed. The CEC were also asked to assign responsibilities for the development of the priority statements and agree timelines for the development of them.

11.2 As part of the 2020-2021 Strategy and Research Business Plan, a piece of work was specified to look into the development of formal Association position statements. Formal position statements can be used to respond to an OU or government policy, position or decision, respond to significant UK/World events or movements, influence decision making and more powerfully advocate the rights and needs of students, for example. Workshops were held with the CEC in January and with the Central Committee Representatives and Senate Reference Group members in February, to discuss and propose areas where it may be helpful for the Association to have a formal stance or position.

11.3 EMAs/Exams in the pandemic and Micro-credentials were common across both sessions. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator acknowledged that a lot of time has passed between the workshops and now and so there could be changes to areas the CEC want to develop formal positions.

11.4 The Student Member of Council stated how she is in support of Micro-credentials being a priority as she receives contradictory information on this matter regularly.

11.5 VP Engagement stated how it would not be appropriate to have multiple position statements coming out at the same time. She did identify that Micro-credentials and digital poverty are priority, but the timing of these statements needs to be well thought through. VP Education outlined a need to prioritise the topics and suggested the creation of a working group to develop the position statements and speed up the process.

11.6 The FBL FAR agreed with this suggestion and also reinforced that timing is crucial and these position statements need to be released in a timely manner. He explained that a position statement regarding the consistency of Tutors should be delayed until the AL contracts issue has been resolved. He further raised concern that by the time a position statement on EMAs/Exams in the pandemic had been released, the issue will have been resolved. He put himself forward to be involved in the working group.

- 11.7 VP Student Support highlighted that a position statement on accessibility and alternative formats must be a priority, as the OU have recently suggested that they may start to phase out pdfs. PDFs are the most accessible form of a document as they can be modified to make them screen-reader friendly. VP Student Support therefore outlined that the Association needs to impact the OU early on, and a statement needs to be put out imminently to prevent the OU making such changes. The student observer, who is also the DSG Chair, said that she was happy to help with a statement on accessibility and alternative formats.
- 11.8 There were contradictory opinions over a position statement regarding Brexit. The Wales AAR explained it is too late for a statement to be put out and that it should have been done already. However, VP Engagement emphasised a need for a statement to show our support for students in Europe.
- 11.9 The President asked for further discussions to move to Teams regarding these position statements. She liked the idea of a working group to get this moving forward. VP Education suggested that the CEC consider the best approach to capture the sheer amount of conversation this is likely to generate and proposed it would be better placed as a forum discussion.
- 11.10 ACTION:** A working group is to be set up with VP Education to lead on this.
- 11.11 ACTION:** Further discussions will take place online on the forums, to enable priority areas to be agreed, to assign responsibilities and agree timelines for the development of the priority statements.

12. OU STUDENTS SHOP

CEC 04/21/12

- 12.1 The Head of Operations presented a presentation to the CEC on the OU Students Shop, to provide a greater insight into how it works and how it's run. Following the presentation, the Head of Operations welcomed any questions from the CEC.
- 12.2 Trading of the OU Students Shop began back in 1995 as OUSA Services Limited, which remained until 31st July 2020. As of 1st August 2020, all trading activities were moved to the OU Students Association. The shop is currently governed by the OU Students Shop Working Group which consists of 4 voting members and 2 advisors. Day to day operations of the shop are supported by the Shop Matters Staff Group.
- 12.3 The shop sells OU branded and OU Students Association branded merchandise, as well as distributing OU past exam papers. It can be accessed through oustudents.com or by its standalone store at oustudentsshop.com. The shop also plays an important face to face role at events such as the graduation ceremonies, residential schools and other OU and OU Students Association events. The OU Students Shop works closely with various other teams and individuals such as the OU Marketing Team, to ensure brand compliance; the OU Warehouse under SLA for storing and processing orders; OU Departments and Faculties, for bulk purchases and bespoke stock; suppliers; service providers, and internally, the Finance and Resources team.
- 12.4 The Operations team is a busy team which facilitates all aspects of the shop. They run daily checks for completed transaction and exam paper downloads, process customer

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queries, process the requests for exchanges and returns, monitor stock levels, liaise with suppliers and stakeholders and run quality control checks to name just a few aspects of their work. To provide a true insight into the shop, the Head of Operations displayed some figures set out below:

- 2,946 online orders were processed for 5,023 individual items
- 2,642 individual donations to OUSET were received
- 178,523 individual exam papers were downloaded
- OU Students Shop had 134,744 views on oustudents.com and 22,685 visitors linking from the main website.

Since the Association stopped processing payments for exam papers, it had received £36,351.17 in donations for OUSET, which was equivalent to around 20 grants from OUSET.

- 12.5 The shop's best sellers were revealed by the Head of Operations. She outlined that the top products can change seasonally and top sellers vary between online sales and face to face sales. The top 3 best sellers online are the Varsity Hoodie (791 sales), Graduation teddy (111 sales) and OU Sweatshirt (79 sales). This compares to the top 3 best sellers at face to face events; Graduation t-shirt (1,152 sales), Graduation Mug (137 sales) and Bookmark (114 sales). The Head of Operations explained that product availability is also likely to affect sale numbers.
- 12.6 The FBL FAR queried the £80,000 cap mark that the shop has recently imposed. He was concerned that this limits the Association and highlighted the important role the OU Students Shop plays in students' experiences. He questioned whether sales will be discouraged where the £80,000 threshold is being nearly reached. The Head of Operations stated that when income was estimated, £80,000 did not seem of easy reach. This mark was part of the limits on trading from within charitable entities and was common across the sector. The team were taking advice on what they'd need to do in the event of exceeding this limit.
- 12.7 VP Education questioned if there was a way for the website to display if something is out of stock. Currently, items are listed as 'limited stock' despite actually being out of stock which is causing frustrations when students try to add an item to their basket but are unable to.
- 12.8 ACTION:** The Head of Operations will take this forward and discuss with the relevant people to ensure that products will show as out of stock, rather than limited stock.
- 12.9 The Open FAR asked whether there was plans to integrate the shop into the new website. The Head of Operations confirmed that discussions had taken place on this and more information would be shared when we were able to.
- 13. OU BUSINESS SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP WITH UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA CEC 04/21/13**
- 13.1 The FBL FAR introduced this paper as the relationship between the OU Business School (OUBS) and the University of Bologna (UniBo) is set to commence in

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September 2021, with students studying for the MSc Finance qualification at both institutions. He provided an update on how the implementation of this relationship will affect students, given that the qualification will be studied in a different way to other OU qualifications.

- 13.2 The FBL FAR highlighted that previous issues surrounding payments have been solved. The payment will be made to the OU, in sterling, and will be reflective of the prices normally charged by UniBo. The OU will then pass on this to UniBo, where necessary. These prices are lower, but not by much, than the OU prices. The price will be fixed in sterling for each offering, with any change in foreign exchange rates being absorbed, or gained, by the OU, providing a stable price for all students in that cohort. Other concerns were raised surrounding the elections and whether students studying in UniBo would be able to stand for AAR Europe. Additionally, concerns over the potential differing standards in the approach to accessibility and teaching were outlined. The FBL FAR welcomed any comments from the CEC.
- 13.3 There were contradictory opinions regarding the elections process and candidates being able to stand for AAR Europe. Some CEC members questioned whether the candidate would have to resign following their return to the UK after the first year of study at UniBo. VP Education asked whether candidates would be able to stand in the first place, as their registered address could be in the UK due to VISA issues. The Director of Membership Services confirmed that this would depend on whether they changed their address on the system. The Student Member of Council suggested altering the remit for AAR Europe to clearly state that 'candidates have to reside in Europe for the length of term' as an example.
- 13.4 The Student Member of Council illustrated how students studying in Italy will have access to both the Association's Support team and the UniBo support team and this could result in potential contradictions. The Chief Executive thanked the FBL FAR for raising this issue and highlighted that he would usually expect there to be a lead partner and therefore a lead student representative organisation, at least for the relevant part of the student's study journey. The University of Bologna had its own student representative arrangements which he believed to be very different to that at the OU. He suggested a conversation be held with the OU's lead for the partnership arrangement to explore the potential confusion and difficulties for the students themselves and for the Association with the aim that a single arrangement could be agreed which would provide certainty for all involved. He offered to help the FBL FAR with any meetings or discussions on this if helpful.
- 13.5 The Wales AAR expressed her support of this partnership and the valuable opportunity that it will provide students. However, she was concerned that this partnership is due to begin in October and there is no contingency plan in place, should Covid still be prominent and continue to cause restrictions. The FBL FAR admitted that this too is a concern of his. The Faculty originally seemed dismissive to put a contingency plan in place, but the FBL FAR confirmed they had recently been more open to doing so.
- 13.6 VP Community queried that if we have students who need to apply for a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) for specialist equipment, would the student apply for it in

their home nation or in Bologna? VP Student Support confirmed that it is not possible to apply for a DSA abroad.

13.7 After an in-depth conversation, it was decided that there were too many unanswered questions for the CEC to make a decision on this. The President asked the FBL FAR to keep the CEC updated with what is going on in the working group for this planned partnership, and to feedback into Teams when more information is received.

13.8 RESOLUTION & ACTION: The FBL FAR will continue to have discussions with the working group and will feedback updates to the CEC via Teams.

**14. INFORMING RESOURCE AND BUDGET PLANNING FOR CEC 04/21/14
2021/20211 AND BEYOND**

14.1 The Head of Finance and Resources introduced this paper on behalf of the authors, explaining that it was helpful to gain an insight into the CEC's thoughts on how the Association should operate their meetings in the future, to enable her to allocate resources and plan the budget accordingly.

14.2 Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association has been functioning remotely since March 2020. All face to face activity is postponed until at least August 2021 but there is a lot more optimism and hope for the future. The purpose of this paper was to open a discussion about future working arrangements to best achieve our goals in the longer term. Although there is lots of uncertainty around the recovery and post-pandemic world, the Head of Finance and Resources explained that we are now at a point where it would be useful to begin to define the new normal for the Association. The CEC had been asked several questions to consider.

14.3 The Student Member of Council outlined that in regard to question 2.1 in the paper, homeworking is personal to each individual and therefore should be considered on an individual basis. She suggested that the way forward is to continue to consult staff and for individual preferences to be taken into consideration. The Director of Membership Services stated that staff had been, and were continuing to be, consulted at every stage. The Head of Finance and Resources re-iterated that the focus of this discussion was around CEC's input into the arrangements. The Head of Finance and Resources asked the CEC whether it makes a difference to CEC representatives, if staff continue to work from home. There was resounding agreement amongst the CEC that staff should do whatever works for them and they will all support the decision that is made. The Wales AAR queried why there wasn't an option for staff to return to the office full time, to which the Head of Finance and Resources confirmed that through the feedback from previous staff surveys this was not a favourable option for staff.

14.4 The FBL FAR stated his concern over fully remote working; there is no ad-hoc discussions in between meetings or on breaks as remote working has caused regimented calendars and little opportunity for further discussions and interactions with others.

14.5 Following this, discussions continued around what is best for student representatives and volunteers. The FBL FAR explained there is definitely a need for a face to face element, but not necessarily each and every event. Online events enabled individuals

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with caring or childcare responsibilities, the opportunity to attend meetings and events more easily. He favoured a blended approach for events and meetings.

- 14.6 VP Community emphasised the importance of face to face interactions, particularly for getting to know new members and build new relationships. She stated that face to face was essential for team building. This opinion was shared widely amongst the CEC with VP Engagement highlighting that she finds meetings more valuable when done in person. VP Education also agreed, outlining that without face to face events/meetings, there is a lack of cohesion and its harder to build relationships with others. The STEM FAR is a newer CEC member and shared her struggles to fit in and get up to speed whilst being remote.
- 14.7 The Head of Finance and Resources asked for a show of hands on who would be happy to have a blended approach in regard to events and meetings.
- 14.8 RESOLUTION:** Only two CEC members voted in favour of this.
- 14.9 The Head of Finance and Resources asked the CEC what services need considering. The Student Member of Council expressed that online meet ups work well and having these online has resulted in an increase in engagement. VP Engagement supported this idea but explained that if an online community is to continue, there is a need for more resources, whether that be more staff or better software to display and facilitate these online events. The FBL FAR expressed that for online meetings and events to continue effectively, training on Teams and Outlook would be beneficial to maximise the effectiveness of operating different aspects online.
- 14.10 The Director of Membership Services gave insight into volunteer training; some volunteer training has worked really well online, some should take a blended approach and other training, such as CEC representatives training should be undertaken face to face. She emphasised that opportunities have been able to come about due to greater capacity – for example, the micro volunteers project has been able to commence as graduations have been on hold.
- 14.11 The final discussion question asked by the Head of Finance and Resources was that in point 2.8 of the paper – what should be the funding priorities?
- 14.12 The FBL FAR suggested that engagement and the community aspect should take priority. Direct funding would provide an opportunity to boost engagement and increase numbers for long term engagement. He suggested greater incentives for getting involved such as prizes or alternatively sending out leaflets to all students within OU mailings, to raise awareness of their membership to the Association and the work it does.
- 14.13 VP Community proposed a need for better software. She explained that there is different software options which facilitate online meetings and events effectively, such as ‘gathertown’. Whilst she expressed her preference for a software platform like ‘gathertown’ she did recognise membership to these are very costly and would not be feasible for every OU student.

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14.14 The Head of Finance and Resources rounded up the discussions with a reminder that in order to get this additional funding, savings have to be generated from other areas, such as not having face to face CEC meetings every time. The discussion had provided some interesting feedback alongside the previously-completed survey.

15. GOVERNANCE REVIEW

CEC 04/21/15

15.1 Julian Lomas from Almond Tree Consulting, presented the results from the Governance Review. He explained that the detail in the recommendations was open for discussion, but the broader details listed in the report and the presentation are strongly recommended.

15.2 The Association had appointed Almond Tree Strategic Consulting to review the current governance structures and mechanisms with particular reference to:

- The transparency and suitability of governance processes and procedures
- The adequacy of roles and responsibilities of decision-makers and terms of reference for decision-making bodies
- Reflection of our stated values in governance practices
- Transparency and agility of decision making
- Suitability of election procedures and appointment processes
- Appropriate accountability
- Agency theory and conflicts of priorities
- Inclusivity and Equality

15.3 Extensive research was conducted with a desk-based review of hundreds of documents and information, 10 randomly chosen comparators, observation of key meetings, key informant interviews and an online survey which was distributed amongst Trustees, students and staff. Data was extensively analysed, and a working group met regularly to oversee the work and agree the methodology.

15.4 In the headline findings, some key strengths of the Association were outlined; levels of commitment, expertise of Trustees, staff and student officers/ reps, probity, foundations for equality, diversity and inclusion and safeguarding. Julian then reported on the Association's weakness, that is, the critical failing in behavioural governance. He identified that there is further significant weakness on equality, diversity and inclusion. The findings from the governance review provide opportunity for structural reform to help address issues such as:

- A new student leadership and representation structure
- Electoral reforms
- Makeup of the Board of Trustees and committee structure
- Replacing business at conference with AGMs

15.5 Julian Lomas clearly outlined that the Association's behavioural governance is fundamentally undermining the good governance and that it is causing a significant barrier to equality, diversity and inclusion. He suggested a layered approach to address this which comprises of establishing clear expectations, nurturing effective behaviours and relationships, a zero-tolerance approach and a regular review and

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independent support from specialists in particular areas. These should all be supported by structural and process changes.

- 15.6 In regard to equality, diversity and inclusion, Julian illustrated that there are considerable practice and behavioural barriers to overcome. He recommended that the Association needs to bust the myth of experience, target promotion at underrepresented groups, reduce workloads, develop progression pathways, install deep listening exercises and reform the election process and the way that role remits are agreed in order to support the aims of one-member-one-vote...
- 15.7 Student leadership and representation was recognised as currently cumbersome and ineffective in its intended role. Julian outlined a recommended re-structure which consisted of 2 tiers – a Student Leadership Committee and a Student Representation Forum. The Student Leadership Committee is designed to be the centralised mechanism for responding to OU requests and allocating roles. The idea is that it will also be responsible for decision making and will be able to generate extra help for representatives to deal with workloads through the newly formed Student Representation Forum. Additionally, there were further suggestions which included the introduction of term limits for CEC representatives, a refocus of the agenda and meeting format so that it is more student focused and agile and less focused on papers and operational detail, reform the balance between elections and appointments, introduce independent scrutiny, increased transparency and accountability and finally, optimise support for volunteers and officers.
- 15.8 The Board of Trustees was reported to lack stability due to the relatively short two-year election cycles, have some skills gaps and also have an unfocused work programme. Almond Tree Strategic Consulting proposed the following:
- 4 each of ex-officio officers, appointed student Trustees and appointed lay Trustees, with a robust and open recruitment process
 - Refocus agenda on strategy, performance, governance and finance
 - New committee structure to sharpen scrutiny and improve risk management
 - Appointments (as at present)
 - Finance, resources and risk
 - Nominations Panel
 - Safeguarding Panel (as at present)
 - Optimise development and support, including space for team building, strategy review and horizon scanning
 - Increase accountability and transparency
- 15.9 The Association's biannual Conference event was felt to be poor value for money and have a confused purpose. Currently, Conference has a business element and a less formal element which is comprised of activities and smaller events. This should be replaced with AGMs, which could still include opportunities for wider activities to happen around this but not in the current format. Furthermore, he proposed the simplification of the Articles of Association to remove a high level of detail from these and move it into the Bye-laws.

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- 15.10 The implementation of these recommendations should be a balance between momentum and not trying to do too much at once. Julian advised that the Association prioritises actions that address behaviours and workload. He further stated a need for a specific communications plan to support the implementation of the recommendations. The CEC were then given the opportunity to ask Julian questions.
- 15.11 The Student Member of Council proposed that when the report goes out to students, that a cover letter goes out alongside it as an additional means of communication. The Open and Access FAR didn't believe that EDI can happen when roles are being reduced. Julian reiterated that the restructure is not creating fewer roles, but it's actually creating more roles just in a different form. It will create greater diversity as there will be far more opportunities to get involved, particularly with the Student Representation Forum.
- 15.12 VP Engagement expressed her support for the recommendations, and particularly for the proposed re-structure. She liked the idea of having a scrutiny panel and was also pleased to see she will be able to receive support with her workload from the Student Representation Forum. The Wales AAR agreed and liked the way the report outlined issues which have been around for a while but have been overlooked. She was excited at the prospect of these recommendations being implemented.
- 15.13 The WELS FAR admitted that she had not read the report but criticised the proposals from Almond Tree Strategic Consulting, stating that they were trying to compare the OU to red-brick universities and other similar higher education institutions and that comparisons cannot be made. Julian responded to emphasise that this was a misunderstanding.
- 15.14 RESOLUTION:** The CEC thanked Julian for his hard work on the report and noted that the report and their feedback would now proceed onwards to the Board of Trustees for further discussion and debate on whether the proposals should be adopted.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

16.1 Social Media Policy Update:

The President stated that the Social Media Policy has been agreed by CEC. It is now with Trustees in their forum, to be agreed.

16.2 Facebook Groups

The Student Member of Council raised an issue with Facebook groups and the problems that arise as a result of the lack of rules. She detailed the inconsistency of these groups, with some requiring questions to answer, some requiring no questions to answer, some being run by current students, some being run by CEC members for

These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the C E C

example. She requested a need for all these groups to be consistent and all pages to be updated.

VP Engagement supported this idea but acknowledged that getting rules consistent in all groups is unlikely to happen immediately. VP Community stated that she has been waiting for the social media policy to be approved so the Facebook Groups will be monitored by some new rules.

VP Education emphasised a need to be transparent with the policy and suggested a Hoot article to be published to inform students of this Social Media Policy coming into place and clearly outlining by what date, the rules will all come in to force. She further advised sharing the article and policy on the Facebook groups to make students well aware.

ACTION: VP Engagement and VP Community to take this forward.

ACTION: The DSG chair to send over the DSG social media policy over to VP Community and VP Engagement to look at.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

17.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of the 2 – 4 July 2021.

Action Log		
Item in the Minutes	Action	Action holder
11.10	A working group to be set up to help discussions on position statements develop	Sarah Jones, Ian Cheyne and Sue Maccabe
11.11	Discussions on developing position statements to be taken to Teams	All CEC members
12.8	OU Students Shop to clearly show if items are out of stock	Magda Hadrys
13.8	The FBL FAR, Gareth Jones, to continue on the working group and feedback more details to the CEC via Teams	Gareth Jones
18.2	Escalate the issue surrounding Facebook groups and the inconsistency of the rules for them	Fanni Zombor and Anca Seaton
18.2	The chair of the DSG to send their social media policy to Fanni and Anca	Megan Brown