



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
24 – 26 January 2020
MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held on the weekend of
24 – 26 January 2020 at the Doubletree by Hilton, Milton Keynes MK1 1ST

PRESENT

Cath Brown – President (Chair)
Patrice Belton - Faculty Association Representative Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)
Ian Cheyne (deputising for Mark Cameron, Area Association Representative Scotland)
Caroline Cowan – Vice President Administration
Billy Docherty – Faculty Association Representative Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)
Amelia Gackowska – Vice President Student Voice
Sarah Jones – Faculty Association Representative Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)
Michail Kasoutas – Area Association Representative Continental Europe
Alison Kingan – Vice President Student Support
Matt Porterfield - Faculty Association Representative Business & Law (FBL)
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
Heather Bloomer – Head of Digital Communications (part)
Wendy Burrell – Deputy Chief Executive (Student & Staff Engagement) (part)
Ian Cheyne – Deputising for Mark Cameron, Area Association Representative Scotland
Gabriella Cull – Executive Support Assistant
Kieran Dingley – Observer, PLEXUS (except items 11, 16)
Kirsty Lamb – Observer, Board of Trustees (except items 11, 16)
Gareth Jones – Observer, FBL/Wales (except items 11, 16)
Sue Maccabe - Strategic Projects & Change Coordinator (part)
Beth Metcalf – Head of Student Volunteering (part)
Dan Moloney – Policy & Public Affairs Manager (part)
Leanne Quanton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (minutes)
Kathy Richardson – Carer
Verity Robinson – Head of Student Support (part)
Pete Turner – Head of Student Community (part)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the January 2020 meeting, giving a special welcome to the observers in attendance: Kirsty Lamb, Gareth Jones, and Kirean Dingley. Dan Moloney, Policy and Public Affairs Manager and Gabriella Cull, Executive Support Assistant were also in attendance from the staff team observing their first CEC meeting as part of their induction.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Theresa Adeoti – Area Association Representative Republic of Ireland
Mark Cameron – Area Association Representative Scotland
Cherry Day – VP Equality & Diversity
Wendy Reid – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland
Steph Stubbins – Deputy President

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 10/19/M) were approved.

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

D.1 **Minute 13.1.** Due to study commitments, the WELS FAR had not yet updated on the Student Engagement Workshop that occurred during Student Voice Week. This will be done in the forum in due course.

D.2 **Minute 17.6.** The OU Council Member requested an update to the discussions held with John D'Arcy, Director, Ireland, regarding his view on combining the two AAR roles in the upcoming elections. The Chief Executive reported that there had been no steer on the political aspects of combining the roles although John D'Arcy had advised his team would assist in better promotion of the role/s if appropriate. The President advised that there had been differences of opinion when she had raised the suggestion with the OU in Ireland office staff. Once finalised the President will post the final CEC role remits in the forum for final approval.

SECTION A: ITEMS FOR APPROVAL AND REPORT

1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

CEC 01/20/1

1.1 VP Student Support updated on the Communications Task and Finish Group Meeting that she attended on 27 January. She asked for CEC feedback on whether students

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would appreciate an email congratulating them once they had completed a module. The CEC agreed that for the majority of students, this would be a positive email to receive and a good idea to implement. They recommended wording to be in celebration of completing a module rather than for the mark received.

- 1.2 VP Student Support added that she had seen the new version of the OU website Help Centre at the last Service Review Meeting. She reported that she liked the new version which contained the same important information but was less cluttered and easier to use on mobile devices.

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS CEC 01/20/2

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES CEC 01/20/3

- 3.1 The FBL FAR was pleased to see that more Societies had now submitted accounts although the report showed seven still remained outstanding. He asked whether these Societies continue to send representatives to the Societies Committee Meeting.

3.2 ACTION: VP Community to confirm.

4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT CEC 01/20/4

- 4.1 The FBL FAR noted the overspend in the budget line for observers attending BoT meetings and questioned why this was different from the CEC observers' budget.

4.2 ACTION: The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) to confirm.

- 4.3 He went on to suggest that the categorisation of the accounts could be improved and made clearer to understand. VP Administration confirmed that she and the Resources Team will be fully reviewing the chart of accounts which will include implementing a new coding structure that should make the accounts more streamlined and better structured.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT CEC 01/20/5

- 5.1 The WELS FAR highlighted her concern about the increased volume in workload in the Volunteering Team due to the increasing requests for volunteers from the University and queried whether additional capacity could be built into the team. The Chief Executive recognised the work that the team are doing but warned that additional resources will be an issue in the next round of subvention as the University had confirmed that there would be no additional funding for 2020-21. The Association will still be making a bid for growth however it may be required to work within its means and look at alternative ways to solve funding issues next year.

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- 5.2 The President welcomed the review of the LER role as they will form an important function in achieving our strategic objectives.

6. POLICY & PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE **CEC 01/20/6**

- 6.1 Dan Moloney, the newly appointed Policy and Public Affairs Manager introduced himself to the CEC and talked about the projects that were either underway or in the pipeline. An initial piece of work that had become apparent was the need for a mechanism for external consultation responses, to include decisions over which ones to respond to, how to respond and who would lead on such responses. He wondered whether a student volunteer panel could potentially assist both his role and the workload of the CEC and invited comments on this. The OU Council Member asked that for whatever mechanism was agreed, the CEC/BoT should continue to have an overview to ensure consistency and that responses were aligned with our strategy.
- 6.2 The FBL FAR questioned the costs involved in working with professional public affairs monitoring agencies as quoted in the paper. The Head of Policy & Public Affairs advised this was still in the early stages and no quotes had yet been received but that he was exploring this with a number of possible providers. Taking into account the budget considerations, he was also exploring existing relationships through the OU's Government and External Affairs team as another avenue.
- 6.3 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager reported that he will be visiting the Nations Offices over the next few months as a priority to build those relationships.

7. THE HOOT **CEC 01/20/7**

- 7.1 VP Media and Campaigns and the Head of Digital Communications discussed the need for more student stories in The Hoot as it continues to grow and becomes an established communications tool for the Association. Ensuring the magazine is promoted as widely as possible was agreed to be a way to generate more student input and suggestions included promotion during Freshers Week, with the Societies and Club Administrators and through better links with the OU. Prizes and competitions were suggested as an effective way to incentivise students to get more involved.

8. CONFERENCE 2020 **CEC 01/20/8**

- 8.1 A query was raised over the costs to produce the Conference App and although it felt like a good idea, the costs would need to be considered. The President confirmed that the proposal was being investigated.
- 8.2 VP Media & Campaigns is working with the Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) on sponsorship of Conference and it was intended to begin approaching suitable potential sponsors with a package deal during February. Companies identified included information technology, banks, insurance and stationery suppliers.
- 8.3 ACTION:** VP Community to set up a forum thread asking for ideas for Conference from the CEC.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

9. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CEC 01/20/9

9.1 The Chief Executive introduced the regular report from the BoT, highlighting the requirement for the BoT to report to the CEC on its activities and giving the chance for the CEC to raise any questions. He advised that Allan Blake had now been formally appointed by CEC as an External Trustee and will officially take up the position of Chair at their next meeting on 7 February 2020. Allan had visited the Association offices on 16 January for an induction day and to meet the staff team. The CEC thought that it would be beneficial for him to observe a future CEC meeting.

9.2 ACTION: Chief Executive to invite Allan Blake to observe the next CEC meeting in April 2020.

9.3 It was likely that there would be further industrial action by UCU around the USS Pension scheme and the ongoing dispute over pay and conditions in the upcoming weeks, potentially to begin at the end of February 2020. An Employee Consultation is currently underway about changes to the scheme. The President reported that she was meeting with UCU who will be keeping the Association updated as things progress and the CEC will be kept informed.

9.4 The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) was producing a specification for a DPO (Data Protection Officer) for the Association and would soon be inviting tenders. She will be approaching the OU to fund this resource as the Association are unable to share the OU's DPO service.

9.5 The Chief Executive thanked the CEC for feeding into the consultation for the Remuneration Committee in the work they are doing in considering and recommending the remuneration for the President and Deputy President for the 2020-22 term. The recommendations will be presented to the BoT at their next meeting.

9.6 Internal discussions are being had regarding the Head of Student Voice vacancy in the staff team and the Senior Management Team are reviewing the team roles and structures before making any changes. The CEC will be kept informed when any changes are made. The CEC formally thanked Sam Harding for her contribution in the post.

10. STRATEGY UPDATE

CEC 01/20/10

10.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator introduced the paper that detailed the initial implementation plans for a series of strategic key performance indicators (KPIs) and tracking metrics and a process for strategy performance management reporting. She advised that this would be a new way of working for the Association and welcomed CEC thoughts. It was intended that a performance management report would come to each CEC meeting once implemented.

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- 10.2 Projects will have phased starts, and the timeline detailed in the paper showed some projects going into the next term. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator advised that each project team will require flexibility and 'associate' roles could be created to involve members in small capacities if required. VP Media & Campaigns questioned the need for big project teams in all projects and identified project 10B as an area that she could focus on quickly before the end of her term. It was confirmed that the size of project teams will depend on the scope but there would be no objection to smaller teams if that were preferable.
- 10.3 The Student Trustee Observer asked whether the review of the Chart of Accounts could be tied into the strategic objectives. It was confirmed that this was the intention, if possible within the current system, and cost tracking will be carried out in each area.
- 10.4 The OU Council Member voiced her concern over workloads of the CEC and staff who are struggling with capacity already. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator advised that capacity was a concern and something that had also been raised by the staff management team, especially in the run-up to Conference. She highlighted that some projects were required to start sooner as they formed the foundation for other projects, namely the Membership and Research Analysis and Stakeholder Engagement Plan which are critical into feeding into other projects but capacity issues had been what had motivated the prioritisation of pushing some projects back to July. It was agreed that the team needed to be realistic in what can be achieved, especially as the CEC were currently missing some CEC members. It was thought that Project Working Groups could be opened wider to CCRs and other student volunteers to ensure that it is not just the CEC.
- 10.4 The OU Council Member asked that although the work on the student representation Code of Practice was noted as on hold due to the staffing review, it should be prioritised as soon as was practicable as this was a vital piece of work.
- 10.5 RESOLUTION:** The CEC approved the KPIs and the new timescales of the projects and endorsed this paper to proceed on to the Trustees for final approval. They congratulated the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator for getting the plan to this stage.

11. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION WEBSITE CEC 01/20/11

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

12. WONKHE STUDENT UNION'S SUBSCRIPTION CEC 01/20/12

- 12.1 VP Media and Campaigns announced a conflict of interest due to her being employed by Wonkhe however she stated that she had brought the proposal to the attention of the CEC as a benefit for the Association. She described the benefits of subscribing to Wonkhe SUs and the packages available for Student Unions.
- 12.2 The CEC could see the benefits of the full package but were concerned with the overall costs and whether the money could be better spent elsewhere, especially

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noting that the OU would not be increasing our subvention this year. It was felt that funds would be better placed to be used for the strategic projects.

12.3 RESOLUTION: The CEC voted against the approval for funding for a Wonkhe SU subscription. They thanked VP Media and Campaigns for bringing the paper and options to their attention.

13. BYE-LAWS **CEC 01/20/13**

13.1 This paper was withdrawn prior to the meeting.

14 ELECTIONS REVIEW **CEC 01/20/14**

14.1 The Elections Review Working Group had brought a number of recommendations to the CEC for approval to implement in the upcoming elections.

14.2 The CEC discussed timings for the election period, highlighting the lessons learnt from 2018 in ensuring that they are not held over the exam period in May plus also ensuring more time for the nominations process. It was noted that additional time would also be required for the administration periods between stages of the process to factor in the new safeguarding procedures alongside the usual eligibility checks.

14.3 ACTION: Head of Student Support will confirm timings with Civica Election Services (formerly ERS) with the aim of announcing the results on Monday 27 April 2020 while factoring in the additional time highlighted. It was likely therefore that nominations would need to open by the end of February or very early in March.

14.4 RESOLUTION: The CEC voted on the recommendations:

- a) **APPROVED:** Photographs remain mandatory for all roles.
- b) **APPROVED:** Video manifestos to remain mandatory for all roles.
- c) **NOT APPROVED:** For all candidates to be asked a question to answer as part of their manifestos.
- d) **APPROVED:** Free text manifesto word count to be reduced to 200 words for all roles except President and Deputy President who will be allowed 400.
- e) **APPROVED:** The number of questions posed in candidate nomination forms to be reduced to 2 for all roles except for the President and Deputy President who will be asked 4 questions.
- f) **APPROVED:** Strategy pledges to be encouraged but optional.
- g) **APPROVED:** Candidate information to include a way to contact the current postholder or appropriate person to ask any questions.
- h) **APPROVED:** Ensure manifestos are downloadable for screen reader ease.
- i) **APPROVED:** Update elections rules and Social Media Guidelines to include that bullying or similar conduct on Facebook/other unofficial spaces will not be tolerated. Candidates to be reminded that from the point they put themselves forward in the election, they are representing the Association.
- j) **APPROVED:** Candidates cannot stand for both a CEC and a Trustee position.
- k) **APPROVED:** Candidates can only stand for one role.

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- l) **APPROVED:** Forums to continue to be closed overnight but candidates were given extra permissions to allow them to answer questions after the forum has closed, subject to confirmation that this functionality can be done by the OUSA Controller.

14.5 Further work will be done around the Q&A phase of the elections and whether questions should be emailed to candidates or to be answered in the forum. The CEC were keen to make engaging in the forums mandatory and further work around implementing this will be carried out.

14.6 The England AAR reported on her ongoing issues in receiving voting codes. It had been confirmed that she was not receiving them due to being on the unsubscribed list in error. She advised that this lists needs looking at to ensure more errors have not been made.

14.6 ACTION: Head of Student Support to continue discussions in the forum.

15 CULTURE REVIEW

CEC 01/20/15

15.1 Andy Loveless and Sorrel Roberts were in attendance from Pecan Partnership, the consultants that had carried out the review into the OU Students Association culture during October to December 2019. The review had been done through feedback from student reps, the wider student body, OU Students Association staff members as well as past staff members and OU staff, using interviews, focus groups, an online survey and reviewing a number of Association resources including online forums. The Pecan Partnership Consultants presented on the feedback, outcomes, and recommendations from the review.

15.2 Feedback was generally positive when asked to describe the current culture, with the majority of descriptions using words such as supportive, friendly and inclusive. The less positive descriptions included caustic, closed and authoritarian. Findings showed that there were some polar opposite views regarding the current culture depending on who was answering the question.

15.3 The Association came out well when respondents were asked to agree with the statements: The Association is offering students the support services that they need, and The Association is creating opportunities for students to engage in a vibrant and inclusive student community. However, over a quarter of respondents disagreed with the statements: The Association is a strong, effective and accountable representative body; and The Association is living its value of 'Openness'.

15.3 Statements made about the Association's value of Integrity contained positive statements such as "Staff/students are all very inclusive and non-judgemental. Present President and CEC seem to take their role very seriously and demonstrate integrity in all that they do. The Association is independent and fair in its representation" and "Accept all different kinds of people from different backgrounds and walks of life. New ideas are always welcome". More negative comments included: "Discrimination; turning a blind eye; covering up mistakes; making up rules as it goes along; total lack of confidentiality" and "New volunteers are declined and new ideas are not welcome but often this is combatted by the more enthusiastic staff, who find ways to encourage change. Cliques. Certain people are favoured repeatedly". The consultants added that

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comments around online bullying, cliques and behind the scenes decision making had come out quite regularly through the research.

- 15.4 The value of Equality and Diversity had received some good comments around the Association Groups (PLEXUS, DSE and BAME) and it was obvious that diversity was high on the Association's agenda however the changing demographic and ensuring the CEC engages with that new demographic was vital to stay relevant.
- 15.5 The Associations value of Openness did not receive such positive comments. "No process for staff or students to be held accountable. Just a complaints system" and "the elections process and stick given to new people who put themselves forward, or how they get pushed out of their roles" were two comments made showing that there is more to work to do in this area and the perceived way some people find the Association and its processes.
- 15.6 The final value, Collaboration had received very positive feedback from the OU staff focus group, showing the positive relationships and increased partnership working had improved with some individuals. One of the comments regarding the CEC and staff team was "Room for improvement in terms of trust, respect and shared goals between the elected reps and the staff team" again showing more work to be done in this area.
- 15.7 In summary, the issues that were causing and/or reinforcing problems with the current culture were, unclear expectations, lack of transparency, lack of visibility, a problem orientation rather than more solution-focused discussions and forward-thinking, high tolerance of unacceptable behaviours, process over people and outcomes and governance. The positive side of this was that the Association cares deeply, has the ambition to make a difference, is student-focused, the recent changes, and achievements including the new strategy and some great team working.
- 15.8 Andy Loveless ran through the issues of the current culture and the impact that had on achieving the strategic objectives. The main challenge was around the 'Engage and Involve' strategy aim in that the perception is that the Association was open but not always welcoming and the idea that there are cliques and it is not working as one big team. It was thought that the culture was compromising the 'Inform and Support' objective because of the speed and transparency around decision making. Although the Association works hard to provide what students need, it is sometimes hampered by some assuming that they know what students need based on their individual experience rather than through proper student engagement. The 'Influence and Transform' objective showed that there was good work happening in pockets, but it tended to be relationship-driven. It was important for the Association to have a strong mechanism to ensure consistency that works every two years for a new team of volunteers.
- 15.9 Recommendations made focussed around 5 priority areas:
 - a) Build consistent collaboration: relationship with OU, between Staff and Reps teams
 - b) Living the values: recognise and celebrate/ zero tolerance of inconsistent behaviour, leadership role modelling
 - c) Increase visibility and access: positioned on the OU website, secure access to the student database

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- d) Develop wider representation: increase number of students engaging, demonstrate engagement with the whole student population, develop volunteer team closer to the current student profile
 - e) Governance review: roles and responsibilities, integrity and efficiency of decision making, accountability
- 15.10 Recommendations included to take a fresh look at how reps and staff work together and develop a 'One Team' mentality and One Team sessions; to recognise and celebrate by sharing more information and generating greater awareness. Zero tolerance of inconsistent behaviour and the general acknowledgment that robust questioning had gone too far and caused new students to not engage or feel welcome. Although it was questioned about how feasible it would be, the recommendations showed that face to face or talking on the phone was generally a better way to handle a situation than online. To build on the good work being done around representation and reaching to the wider communities. Lastly, to carry out a Governance Review.
- 15.11 The CEC agreed and respected the comments made in the report and felt that it was a helpful and constructive way forward and were all behind the recommendations made. They spoke about prioritising the recommendations and agreeing that building consistent collaboration, living our values and the governance review should be the priority focus and work to start as soon as possible.
- 15.13 The findings and recommendations would next go to the BoT for endorsement at their next meeting on 7 February.
- 15.12 The CEC thanked Pecan Partnership for a valuable and worthwhile piece of work.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 17.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of 24 – 26 April 2020.