



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
18 July 2020
MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 10 – 21 July 2020 and via Microsoft Teams on 18 July 2020

PRESENT

Cath Brown – President (Chair)
Patrice Belton - Faculty Association Representative Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM)
Mark Cameron - Area Association Representative Scotland
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 –OU Council Member
Fanni Zombor – Vice President Media and Campaigns

IN ATTENDANCE

Ray Adcock – Observer, Europe AAR (Elect)
Rob Avann – Chief Executive
Gabriella Cull – Executive Support Assistant (minutes)
Ian Cheyne – Observer, Deputy President (Elect)
Lorena Fontan Grana – Observer, WALES AAR (Elect)
Gareth Jones – Observer, FBL FAR (Elect)
Jessica Liddell – Observer, OU Council Member (Elect)
Sue Maccabe – Strategy Change and Projects Coordinator (Forum meeting only)
Leah McDougal – Digital Communications Optimisation Officer (Forum meeting only)
Cinnomen McGuigan – Observer VP Education (Elect)
Beth Metcalf – Head of Student Volunteering
Leanne Quainton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare
Verity Saunders – Observer, WELS FAR (Elect)
Amy Undrell – Conference Project Manager (part)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the July 2020 meeting – the final one of the current CEC term. She welcomed the incoming CEC members who would be starting their term on 1 August 2020 and were observing this final CEC meeting.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Caroline Cowan – VP Admin
Amelia Gackowska – VP Student Voice
Wendy Reid – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland (Teams Meeting)

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 04/20/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 10 – 12 July 2020

1. **RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE** **CEC 07/20/1**
2. **RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS** **CEC 07/20/2**
 - 2.1 The England AAR questioned whether there would be a by-election to fill the vacant roles within PLEXUS following the Chair of the Group stepping down. She also asked how CEC members could help support the remaining committee members with the planned work and projects they had scheduled.
3. **RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES** **CEC 07/20/3**
 - 3.1 The incoming VP Education and Chair of Societies highlighted how pleased she was with the high turnout the Societies session received at Conference and the number of new students who had shown interest in joining a Society since.
4. **RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT** **CEC 07/20/4**

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 17 – 29 April 2020

- 5. RECEIVED: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT CEC 07/20/5**
- 6. RECEIVED: POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS CEC 07/20/6**
- 6.1 The OU Council member stated how pleased she was to see how the Association’s external affairs brief was being handled.
- 7. RECEIVED: STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE CEC 07/20/7**
- 7.1 The update paper produced by the President and the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator, detailed updates on the current project workstreams underway. These included details of the soft launch of the membership survey, the individual representation feasibility study which had been completed, and the business case which was now being developed, and developing a shared code of practice for academic representation.
- 7.2 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator highlighted that there was an error within the data shown in Question 18, the motivation to volunteer, and it should have shown that 40% of respondents ticked ‘to help the student community’ rather than 0%. She also took a recommendation of changing the ordering of the agree/disagree categories in question 20 before issuing the full analysis report in October.
- 7.3 The England AAR raised concern regarding the 1% response rate to the annual membership survey and whether the low response reflected general disinterest in the Association. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator gave context behind this result, explaining that several factors such as timing and an audience of only 30,000 impacted it greatly. Having a selected audience of 30,000 meant that blast promoting across all media channels wasn’t possible. Additionally, she explained that the OU CAMEL system, which was used to mail students, offers no ability to create an attractive and visually impactful or branded email, resulting in fewer students being drawn to completing the survey. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic situation caused reminder emails to not be sent as the OU prioritised more urgent communications. These factors all impacted the response rate.
- 7.5 The main launch of the survey will take place in the Autumn and will provide all students with the opportunity to be heard. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator outlined the aim to reach a 3% response rate, and with the addition of a prize draw following completion and branded CAMEL templates, they are hoping this will be possible.
- 8. RECEIVED: ANNUAL ANALYTICS CEC 07/20/8**

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- 8.1 The report, produced by VP Media and Campaigns and the Digital Communications team, detailed annual analytics for the OU Students website, The Hoot, and on Social media.
- 8.2 VP Student Support asked whether the increased traffic to the Association's website this year was due to Conference and elections. She further suggested that it would be good to do a comparison of the traffic this year around Conference to that of the next Conference. VP Media and Campaigns responded, explaining that Conference and elections caused an extra 30,000 clicks on the site. She further recognised that whilst comparing the traffic like for like would be beneficial, it is very difficult to achieve due to different communications being only relevant at certain times of the year, trying to exclude them would be problematic; the resulting data would be less realistic on the overall numbers.
- 8.3 The incoming AAR Europe questioned why the USA and Sri-Lanka had the highest number of non-UK users to the website. After some discussion, it became apparent that this was because of internet security; many students try to make their tracking more difficult, so the location is rarely accurate. VP Media & Campaigns supported this, explaining that anyone who uses VPN will show up as in a different country. Therefore, skewing the results.
- 8.4 The analytics showed that users were split by gender in a 46% male to 54% female ratio. VP Student Support wanted to understand how these demographics were retrieved and asked whether there could be more categories than just male or female. VP Media and Campaigns and Digital Optimisation Officer, Leah McDougall, explained that due to using google analytics to gain the website data, user information is collected when users provide information to a google account or google partner. Subsequently, the Digital Optimisation Officer outlined that we cannot control what statistics we obtain from Google.
- 8.5 VP Student Support was keen to see the statistics for the numbers of users in Scotland, due to the developing and new working relationship with the OUiS (OU in Scotland). VP Media and Campaigns provided a breakdown of the UK statistics which evidenced 7616 Scottish users out of 70,835 UK users in total. It was felt that this statistic would be useful in showing how effective the Association has been in working with the OUiS as it can be used to show an increase in student engagement.

9. WEBSITE UPDATE CEC 07/20/9

- 9.1 This item was of a confidential nature and has therefore been reserved to the confidential section of the minutes. The CEC observers left the meeting for this item.

10. RECEIVED: ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES CEC 07/20/10

- 10.1 The WELS FAR and President (elect) updated on the three workshops she ran during Student Voice Week in November 2019 that focussed on student engagement using Lego.
- 10.2 The CEC congratulated the WELS FAR on the success of her workshops. Using Lego, she had created meaningful discussion and gained important information through this

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medium. She had engaged many students through her workshops and so the CEC gave thanks for her efforts.

- 10.2 VP Student Support was interested to find out whether the use of Lego constrained attendees' responses or enabled them to look at issues from a different perspective, which in turn gave a new insight. The WELS FAR confirmed that she had responses from attendees explaining that using Lego had helped them with their thinking and gave them new insights.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Taken on 18 July via Microsoft Teams

11. BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

CEC 07/20/11

- 11.1 The Chief Executive introduced the regular paper and for the benefit of observers, outlined that this report comes to every CEC meeting in order to show the work and focus of the Board of Trustees (BoT) and provides the CEC with an opportunity to ask questions.
- 11.2 He drew attention to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic situation and the staff team response to it, particularly focusing on recovery planning. The staff Coronavirus Contingency Group continues to meet regularly to review the latest information and to discuss any staffing or work-related issues. The Chief Executive explained that all staff are working from home for the foreseeable future. Campus has re-opened for OU business-critical teams or units but there is no intention for Association staff to be back before the Autumn, however, the latest Government announcement will mean more discussion will need to take place. Trustees had agreed the Association's Recovery Plan that had been submitted to the OU as well as approving the position that all events will stay online as a default until 2021.
- 11.3 **ACTION:** The FBL FAR and incoming VP Admin questioned the office phone number and who that was being forwarded to whilst staff are working from home. The Chief Executive will consult the Head of Operations and report back.
- 11.4 Conference was recognised for its huge success, particularly as this was the first year it had all been held completely online. The business at Conference had received the highest levels of voting yet with 80.89% of delegates voting. All resolutions had been passed. The 'quick vote' option was the preferred method of voting with most delegates opting for this way. The full evaluation of Conference will go to the October CEC meeting.
- 11.4 Trustees had approved to move some of the Association's reserves into a 95-day deposit account in order to avoid the current low-interest rates. The incoming VP Admin and Deputy Chief Executive (Finance and Resources) have begun to talk about alternative ways the Association can generate money and make savings in the future. External advice will be sought in order to make the most financially effective decisions.

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- 11.5 Following Trustees approval of meetings and events being online only for the rest of 2020, it was questioned whether the budget for face to face meet-ups and other areas where there are savings, will be able to be used for other things, so long as they are within the same project/focus. The Chief Executive outlined that the budget had already been amended for the next financial year taking these changes into account, but it will be closely monitored and kept under review constantly. With so many unknowns, it is hard to predict the future so the Association needs to be careful with funds but as time goes on and we know more, there may be opportunities for budgets to be used elsewhere.
- 11.8 Several questions were asked regarding the Association's budget, particularly as a large sum of money was saved from Conference being held online this year. The Wales AAR wanted some explanation around what will happen to the money saved from Conference. The Chief Executive confirmed that any savings would go into the Association's reserves and the University hadn't requested any clawback however that's not to say that it won't affect next year's subvention.
- 11.9 VP Media and Campaigns recognised that other student unions are facing financial difficulty due to COVID-19 and questioned what would happen if the Open University ran into financial difficulty. The President responded that whilst things are unclear, the Open University is not struggling at this time. She reported that the OU were not having some of the financial concerns being faced in other higher education providers as they are not reliant on the international market like some other universities are.

12. VOLUNTEER STRATEGY

CEC 07/20/12

- 12.1 Beth Metcalf, Head of Volunteering, introduced the paper. She outlined that during the process of developing the Association's new strategy, three strands had been identified as enablers to the overall strategy; the Research Strategy, Communications Strategy, and Volunteer Strategy. She highlighted how volunteers play a pivotal role within the Association and therefore it was important that there were strategic aims within the Volunteer team in order to maintain and implement the best practice across all aspects of volunteering. This Volunteer Strategy was consequently designed to support wider themes of the Association strategy whilst ensuring a clear focus for volunteering. Comments had been received in the forum and incorporated into this version for CEC approval.
- 12.2 The England AAR outlined the importance of ensuring the strategy has a focus on looking after its current volunteers and making sure they feel included as well as focusing on increasing the number of new volunteers. This followed some recent conversations in the CCR forum that were being addressed by the Head of Volunteering and the President. The incoming VP Education highlighted the respect that the Association has for all its volunteers and is a message that she will be working hard to get across when she starts in the role. The new voices should be supplementing the already active volunteers the Association have. The President agreed, adding that the forum conversation was around volunteers fulfilling obligations which is crucial to the CCR role.
- 12.3 With one of the strategy aims being to engage more volunteers, the incoming FBL FAR questioned whether the volunteering team has the capacity to cope with an

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increase in new volunteers. The Chief Executive confirmed that there has been a restructuring of this staff team which will enable capacity to help with being able to give full support to all the Association's volunteers. This new structure will be announced in August.

- 12.4 Lengthy discussions then followed about having a diverse range of volunteers and how best to market the Association when trying to engage newer, younger students. Some CEC members illustrated the need to work harder to widen the demographic of Association volunteers to match the current demographic of OU students.
- 12.5 ACTION:** The OU Council member to forward minor suggestions for wording, to make it clearer and concise in areas for the Head of Volunteering to amend.
- 12.6 RESOLUTION:** Subject to the tweaks in wording, the CEC approved the Volunteer strategy.

13. STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORTING PROTOTYPE CEC 07/20/13

- 13.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator and the President introduced the paper that proposed the format of how the Association will report on the updates to the strategy project. It proposed a quarterly performance report which will go to both the CEC and BOT and contain three sections; performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), progress on strategic projects, and finally, progress against the team business plans. There will be a cover paper that will give the narrative behind the data and incoming President, Sarah Jones, will work alongside the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator to create this narrative. She asked for feedback from the CEC, specifically focusing on whether these reports will give the correct amount of information.
- 13.2 This paper was greatly received, with the CEC thanking Sue and the President, for their hard work in creating such a detailed piece of work. The template of the report was described as 'easy to understand' was seen as a real positive. VP Student Support thanked the team for not making it colour reliant but did however recognise that if this will be seen by students outside the CEC, then the arrows in the strategy template need to be changed as they are not screen reader-friendly.
- 13.3 ACTION:** The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator to make the report fully accessible for when posting online.
- 13.4 Incoming Deputy President, Ian Cheyne asked whether delivering parts of the strategy will be realistic, especially with the current COVID-19 situation. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator confirmed that there would always be a need to look at what was causing the metrics and relating them back to current external factors. Therefore, it is accepted that COVID-19 will affect some of the metrics but these will be constantly under review and where necessary, metrics can be removed.
- 13.5 The OU Council Member expressed her gratitude to Sue and Cath for their hard work in creating such a complex but comprehensible piece of work. She acknowledged that providing explanations of movement can be difficult and subsequently wanted to clarify whether explanations will be given to describe upwards and downwards trends in the

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metrics. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator outlined that the processes listed in this paper are to create the data, but narratives will be created by the incoming President and herself in the covering paper which will be crucial for understanding the data.

13.6 RESOLUTION: The CEC approved the format of the quarterly strategy performance report.

14. CONFERENCE 2020

CEC 07/20/14

- 14.1 The Conference Project Manager, Amy Undrell, presented this paper on behalf of the Steering Committee. The paper gave an initial overview and some key highlights of Conference 2020, with the full evaluation report being presented to the CEC in October.
- 14.2 The business element of Conference took place online from the 12-24 June. The results were extremely positive with 347 votes cast out of a possible 429 registered Conference delegates. This was a voting turnout of 80.89% - the highest voting percentage ever seen. The guidebook app was also well-received, with 338 downloads to both Google and Android devices. The welcome session was one of the most viewed sessions over the weekend, followed closely by speaker Emma Hardy's talk and Professor Brian Cox which had 424 views. The graph detailed the effectiveness and efficiency of the app, giving evidence of its use and the number of times people added each session to their personalised schedule. The consultations were also well attended with the flexible study session being most popular amongst delegates. Overall, the feedback for the app so far, suggested it was easy to use and provided a simple way to get all desired events into one area.
- 14.3 There had been a few comments received around the business voting and it was recommended that the online discussions on the forums about the business should happen before the voting opens so delegates can observe discussions before voting too early and then wanting to change their votes. Similarly, issues were raised around the 'quick vote' option and confusion with some students clicking on the quick vote option straight away without understanding that this meant that they approved everything without having read any of the papers. It was suggested that the quick vote option needs careful consideration if used at future Conferences.
- 14.4 The success of the Societies Showcase was evidenced by the current Societies Chair, Cin McGuigan. Since the session at Conference, there had been 51 new members to the Write Club Society which was a huge achievement. Head of Volunteering echoed this and outlined that the volunteer team has also had a big increase in volunteers.
- 14.5 Discussions were had around the benefits of holding Conference online, with suggestions that the business could be held online in the future which not only gives the Association a greater response and assurance in meeting quoracy, but it also frees up the Conference weekend for other activities. However, it was noted that this may not work for the years that changes are made to the Articles of Association where greater time may be needed. Some CEC members were in favour of taking more of an online stance to future Conferences, acknowledging benefits such as reaching out to a wider amount of the membership, being less costly, and easier to get speakers

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involved. However, other members were in favour of face to face Conferences, outlining the importance of meeting other students. The President agreed that any online event cannot replace the face to face Conference but did recognise that there should be more effort put into the online aspects of Conference to make it better and more enjoyable for those delegates.

- 14.6 Following completion of the Conference feedback survey, each student received a £5 voucher to spend in the shop. However, many CEC members outlined issues with vouchers not working and a lot of items in the shop being out of stock. Members of the CEC questioned whether the expiration of the voucher could be extended beyond 31 July because of these reasons.
- 14.7 ACTION:** The Conference Project Manager, to find out whether the expiration date on vouchers can be extended and will report back to CEC with the resolution.
- 14.8 Another issue reported by CEC members was that the newsletters and other Conference emails kept ending up in student's junk folders. VP Media and Campaigns gave context to this issue and said it is something out of our control and to do with Outlook's increasing security. Any special character can trigger the email to be identified as spam. This should be looked at by the Digital Comms team to ensure this is minimised.
- 14.9 ACTION:** Digital Comms team to take forward.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 15.1 The OU Council member put forward the idea of having an Annual Effectiveness Review, as a way to monitor and help the CEC be more effective. It was confirmed that these do take place biennially, the last one being in 2019. It was intended for the CEC to complete halfway through their terms, giving them time to settle into their roles and then enough time to incorporate any changes for the final year.
- 15.2 VP Media and Campaigns commented that although outside of the Effectiveness Review, getting other student's perceptions of the CEC would be of value to the Association. Head of Volunteering explained that they had been exploring the idea of a scrutiny panel where discussions can be taken to forums following scrutiny from students to get their views and opinions. It was recognised that to get accurate data, views and perceptions would need to come from not just volunteers, but other people from outside of the CEC.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 16.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of the 2 - 4 October.