



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)  
25 June – 6 July 2021**

**MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 25 June – 6 July 2021 and via Microsoft Teams on 3 July 2021.

**PRESENT**

Ian Cheyne – Deputy President  
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  
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  
Nichola Connolly – Observing prior to ratification as co-opted Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)  
Gabiella Cull – Executive Support Assistant (minutes)  
Sue Maccabe – Strategy Change and Projects Coordinator  
Haf Merrifield – Director of Strategy (part)  
Reiss Miller – Staff Observer  
Georgie Moore – Executive Support Assistant  
Jiten Patel – External speaker (part)  
Elena Sanchez-Heras – Student Observer  
Kevin Shakeshaff – PVC Research (part)  
Hanna Silk – Observing prior to ratification as co-opted Area Association Representative for Wales  
Lyndsay Thomson – OU Pride Observer  
Kate Wells – Observing prior to ratification as co-opted Area Association Representative for Continental Europe  
Leanne White – Observing prior to ratification as co-opted Area Association Representative (AAR) for England

**INTRODUCTORY ITEMS**

**A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME**

The President welcomed the CEC to the July 2021 meeting and gave a special welcome to the four proposed co-opted CEC members who were observing prior to formal ratification by the Board of Trustees, in addition to two student Observers and two members of staff who were each attending their first CEC.

**B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**C. MINUTES**

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 04/21/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 25 June – 6 July 2021

**1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**CEC 07/21/1**

- 1.1 There was continued discussions around the format of the blank reports in this paper, with VP Student Support making clear she would not receive this paper for this reason. The Student Member of Council provided a valid suggestion for the wording of future unavailable reports. This wording and format will be adopted for future CECs.
- 1.2 The FBL FAR was pleased to see that FBL have shown great enthusiasm for digital wallets and have asked for further information surrounding them. He also explained that he had had a conversation about Post Graduate Research (PGR) students recently and found that they were of the opinion that there is some reluctance to be involved with the Students Association. The President confirmed there is a PGR Liaison group that the Deputy President sits on which all faculties feed into. She illustrated they need to do some more work surrounding this group.
- 1.3 The President was really pleased to see the hard work that has been going on in the last quarter by CEC members, namely, behavioural issues tackled in a new way, two new societies joining the Association, the progression of the Individual Representation

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Pilot, progression of Student Voice Week and the OU's Student Gender Based Violence policy and the recent success of the STEM drop in chats.

**2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS CEC 07/21/2**

- 2.1 All CEC members noted a comprehensive report submitted by the Chair of OU Pride for the second consecutive occasion. They gave their thanks to the Chair for producing such an insightful report and to the group for all the achievements they are making in such challenging times. The Open FAR highlighted the work the DSG are also doing on a day to day basis.
- 2.2 The FBL FAR stated his excitement for OU Pride as they have been approached by the Raindance Film Club, providing them with an opportunity to increase external exposure. He further recognised the challenging period this group are facing following the creation of the GCRN but expressed the Association's continued support for this group.

**3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES CEC 07/21/3**

- 3.1 The Head of Finance and Resources was pleased to report that the Law society's accounts for 2019/20 had now been approved by VP Administration. She gave her thanks to the FBL FAR whose thorough investigation of the societies emails and records enabled the Finance and Resources team to construct the accounts. She outlined that he has put in place robust but simple record keeping for the Society going forwards, which in future, will be able to assist other societies experiencing the same issues.
- 3.2 The FBL FAR confirmed that the Commercial Awareness Society held its AGM on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June too. Whilst it is disappointing that there are still a significant number of non-compliant societies, the FBL FAR recognised the difficulties some societies face and so he was glad to welcome extra support and training in this area.
- 3.3 The CEC likewise gave thanks to the FBL FAR for all his hard work in this challenging and time-consuming task.

**4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT CEC 07/21/4**

- 4.1 The CEC were pleased to see the recent gain of the Santander grant. The FBL FAR queried how the Association obtained it, to which the Head of Finance and Resources confirmed it came from the Development Office following discussions with the Head of Student Support. The Development office had received it from Santander and were looking for a project that met the criteria. The Head of Student Support was able to offer some suggestions, one which detailed the promotion leaflet.
- 4.2 The Student Member of Council and VP Education were delighted to read that the hurdle for EU based students who want to order merchandise has been overcome and so they are now able to place orders again.

**SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 25 June – 6 July 2021

- 5. RECEIVED: BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT** **CEC 07/21/5**
- 5.1 The CEC received this report and thanked the Chief Executive for this update.
- 6. RECEIVED: EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION WORKING GROUP UPDATE** **CEC 07/21/6**
- 6.1 There was a lot of discussions surrounding the terminology and the current use of the term 'BAME'. The FBL FAR highlighted that the Dean of EDI, as well as many others, do not like the use of the term 'BAME' and has also seen some people in the OU question the term 'EDI', with some preferring EDIA (A meaning accessibility). He did however recognise the near impossible task of meeting individual preferences of such terminology. However, he outlined that the Association must be consistent. The President supported this need for consistency and recommended seeking advice from the Dean of EDI.
- 6.2 The Student Member of Council confirmed that a recent OU strategy workshop considered that the E in EDI/EDIA , should not stand for equality but equity, because it is actually equity that we should be striving for amongst the different groups. VP EDI urged CEC members to undertake their own personal research on equality vs equity so that they can come together with a better understanding on what the Association should adopt.
- 6.3 The President noted that whilst unconscious bias training might not fulfil all of the requirements, it could become part of a suite of training that is rolled out. The Deputy President raised concerns over unconscious bias training, due to the issues that being over-analytical can cause. VP Administration welcomed additional training on anti-racism (and other protected characteristics) but felt that it should not replace unconscious bias training. He stated it should be an additional measure when a need is identified.
- 6.4 The President thanked the EDI working group for their continued hard work.
- 7. RECEIVED: ANNUAL ANALYTICS** **CEC 07/21/7**
- 7.1 The CEC found this report really helpful and thanked the Digital Communications Optimisation Officer for his work in putting this analysis together.
- 7.2 VP Community highlighted the increase in desktop users in comparison with mobile and tablet users and recognised the impact that the pandemic had caused on several analytics. She further outlined how recent changes to Facebook have led to admins finding it more difficult to share posts from the main Association Facebook account and so this illustrated that students may be experiencing the same issues.
- 8. RECEIVED: WEBSITE UPDATE** **CEC 07/21/8**

8.1 This paper is of a confidential nature and is therefore reserved to the confidential minutes.

**9. RECEIVED: BRANDING UPDATE CEC 07/21/9**

9.1 A couple of CEC members noted that they would have liked to have seen this as a discussion paper, rather than one for information only, to allow CEC members to contribute their thoughts from the offset and make early suggestions. The President picked this up and outlined whether there could be an opportunity to do this in the near future, with events such as the Association's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

**10. RECEIVED: SCOTLAND AND WALES MANIFESTO UPDATE CEC 07/21/10**

10.1 The FBL FAR offered his gratitude to everyone involved in making these manifestos possible, particularly the Director of Engagement and the previous Wales and Scotland AARs who had both sadly had to step down in the last quarter. He recognised that while it was unfortunate to have a low student engagement, it was still great to hear positive comments from candidates and he was glad to see that the Association will continue with proactive contacts to promote the manifestos to successful candidates.

10.2 The Student Member of Council expressed her support for keeping the individual Nation's pages on the website as there will be other relevant information which should be put on the nation's pages. She was also interested to see how many OU alumni were standing for election; recognising the proof that OU degrees can open new opportunities.

10.3 VP EDI explained it would be insightful to know where engagement was low so that campaigning could be more focused in those harder to reach areas for the next time, rather than in spaces where students are well known to interact.

**SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

Taken on 3 July via Microsoft Teams

**11. STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT CEC 07/21/11**

11.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator introduced the performance report which gives updates on the Key Performance Indicators, the fourteen projects in the 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 website and the Hoot, membership levels for Clubs, Societies and Groups and use of peer support and library support services. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator highlighted that due to the success of the library study support scheme, FASS will be increasing the number of masters and post grad modules available to SiSE. There has also been a large increase in year-on-year active volunteering roles and a significant increase in the percentage of new volunteers applying for roles.

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Following this, she outlined the areas where metrics are currently reflecting downward trends; newsletter engagement, video views and Totum card registrations. Whilst these are showing negative trends, the Strategic Projects and Change coordinator expressed no significant concerns over these as they are to be expected and so no worrying trends.

- 11.2 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator acknowledged the completion of project 4 which focused on mapping the student journey from registration through to graduation. The project team have since created the recommendations and produced an impressive piece of work. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator thanked the team for all their hard work in this project, and gave special recognition to the projects lead, the Senior Digital Communications Officer and Faculty Association Representative for FBL.
- 11.3 Project 11, which was to commission an external governance review of the OU Students Association, has likewise reached completion in the last quarter. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator outlined that now the recommendations have been given and presented to the Association, an action plan is being pulled together to implement these recommendations. It was suggested that some recommendations could be put into business as usual to prevent duplication within the strategy performance report and projects. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator explained that the recommendations will be distributed amongst different members of the Association and will be worked out within their remit.
- 11.4 VP Education stated that it is misleading to display that some projects are completed. She used project 2, providing individual representation for students, as an example. Whilst it is marked as completed in the strategy performance report, the work is still ongoing with this service. VP EDI further suggested whether a timeline could be put into each project so each stage of the project is clearly outlined and the progress can be monitored clearly. She recognised the benefits of being able to see the different phases of each project. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator accepted these comments and illustrated how they have listed different phases and the status of each phase amongst the projects update, to make it clearer. The Individual Representation project's original scope was to undertake a feasibility study, which had been completed. The work that was now taking place was to implement the service, thanks to the success of the business case based upon that feasibility study. VP Education then questioned whether the volunteer demographic data could be displayed in a different way to make it more accessible. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator confirmed that they will turn it into a more accessible format for the future CEC meetings, but explained that due to receiving the data at the last minute, the format couldn't be changed on this occasion.
- 11.5 **RESOLUTION:** the CEC received the Strategy Performance Report and thanked the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator for her work on this latest report.

**12. ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP SURVEY REVIEW CEC 07/21/12**

- 12.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator put forward this paper on behalf of the Research Assistant who unfortunately couldn't attend the CEC meeting. The CEC

were asked to provide feedback and comments in relation to the analysis findings, discuss whether the findings indicate any particular areas which may need to be focused on for future development and/or improvement and finally they were asked to discuss ways in which the Association could seek to improve student engagement and response rates. The analysis was on the Autumn roll out. The next survey will be released in October 2021.

- 12.2 The Student member of Council was keen to know the response rate of the February pilot as this wasn't detailed in the report. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator stated that the response rate from the February pilot was 0.98% compared to the 0.8% response rate in the Autumn 2020 roll out.
- 12.3 VP EDI questioned whether the wording of 'survey' could be changed in the communications surrounding the annual membership survey, due to the many negative connotations that it has. She explained how some people perceive surveys to be invasive and time consuming, resulting in many students ignoring the emails inviting them to complete the survey. She further suggested introducing a reward for completing it. The 0.8% response rate disheartened the VP EDI, especially as the survey was sent to 160,764 students.
- 12.4 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator agreed that a reward could be beneficial, but did highlight that in the Autumn survey, there was a prize draw with 1<sup>st</sup> prize winning an iPad and beats headphones, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize being a £150 voucher and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize being 3 £50 vouchers. She also confirmed that the survey will be released earlier this year, as they believe the low response rate could have been affected by the survey being released too close to the Christmas break. It was found in the analysis that AL promotion caused spikes in engagement with the survey, so there is every intention to promote in this way again in the Autumn. A student observer recognised that around September there is likely to be the Fresher's survey. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator exercised caution around survey fatigue so will look into when other surveys are being released to avoid clashes amongst them all.
- 12.5 VP Education suggested that Student Voice Week (SVW) will offer a good platform for promotion of the survey. She explained that a video on why the Annual Membership Survey is so important would help raise the profile and importance of it. This video could be shared in meetings and consultations during SVW, and in tutor groups as a whole. VP Community agreed that the Association needs to clearly display how student feedback can help improve student issues, making it more meaningful. She further suggested putting 'intensity snippets' on The Hoot. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator acknowledged a need for new, innovative and creative ways of sharing our research and survey results with students, in an attempt to be more engaging.
- 12.6 The Student Member of Council advised caution against releasing the survey too early as Fresher's wouldn't have had enough time to form opinions and gain great perspectives on things. She suggested it close in SVW and release earlier than this. Additionally, she agreed that we need to think of creative ways to present the research, such as bitesize briefings and one-page infographics. The areas for improvement also need to be shared amongst students to present what changes will be made and why.

- 12.7 VP Engagement illustrated that 35 questions is too many as it requires around 25 minutes of students' time. She questioned whether we could have core questions and then other additional questions which could be answered at the students' discretion. Without reducing the number of questions, engagement won't increase. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator recognised there is a balancing act between asking enough questions to give us enough data needed, whilst not overloading students with too many questions.
- 12.8 Ongoing discussions continued around whether the survey could be split into a few smaller surveys over the year and whether we could focus on a different aspect/topic each year. The FBL FAR cautioned against having too many sub-surveys in a year as it could make engagement even more difficult.
- 12.9 VP Community questioned whether there is any data on students who started the survey but didn't complete it. She highlighted that these students could provide a valuable insight into what surveys would be most appealing for the student body. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator wasn't aware of this data being available as of yet.
- 12.10 RESOLUTION AND ACTION:** Further discussions will take place online on the Teams forums.

### **13. OU STRATEGY UPDATE**

- 13.1 Haf Merrifield, the Director of Strategy at the Open University was in attendance to update the CEC on the OU's strategy. She outlined the purpose of having a strategy, identifying the need for a shared view of strategic intentions which is understood and supported by a distributed and diverse stakeholder community, that it supports future prioritisation and decision making at pace and likewise allows for meaningful future discussions of progress and performance relative to agreed statements of purpose and intention.
- 13.2 Following this, she detailed a strategy development timeline which outlines past, current and future key dates and events. Haf made the CEC aware that there was a Senate workshop in February 2021 and that there will be another one on 15 September 2021 to discuss the strategy in further detail. Following the workshop in September, Council will consider a draft strategy text, which Senate will have the opportunity to consider it afterwards, and then Council will consider a draft strategy for approval in November.
- 13.3 Haf explained to the CEC that there had been various ongoing consultations relating to the draft strategy. These included a mission survey sent to staff and students and another consultation surrounding strategic goals and enablers. Feedback from the mission survey concluded a decision to retain the OU's mission, that it continues to be a major motivator for staff, that being 'open to people' and supporting student success were important parts of how the OU brings the mission to life. Feedback identified from the strategic goals and enablers consultation concluded that there is a desire for a stronger sense of overall ambition, desire for a clearer line on what is distinctive about the OU and that work needs to be improved in respect of the four nations. The



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session was concluded with the OU's next steps. This involved reflecting on key points from feedback, working through main issues with VCE and experts, gaining approvals through varying Governance structures and finally developing the performance framework.

13.4 The CEC thanked Haf for coming along to update them on the OU's strategy.

#### **14. MAPPING AN INCLUSIVE FUTURE**

14.1 Jiten Patel ran this workshop for the CEC to start the process of looking back so that we can look forward to an Association that not only embraces but takes action to further develop what an inclusive future for OU students might look like. He began the session by presenting data on the characteristics of OU students back in 2014 in comparison to 2020. Noticeable differences were outlined; the 25-29 age group has increased from 18% to 21%, with the 30 and over group decreasing from 64% to 59%. The number of OU students declaring a disability has also increased from 17% to 24%. The proportion of men to women has remained similar with a near 60:40 split. Ethnic origin of students has remained very similar over these 6 years.

14.2 The CEC were then asked to discuss the Strengths of the Association now and looking forward, weaknesses now and looking forward, as well as threats and opportunities. Discussions were lengthy and very insightful. This session tied in well with the halfway review of the strategy so it was a very beneficial workshop.

#### **15. OU SOCIETAL CHALLENGES**

15.1 Kevin Shakeshaff, the new PVC Research was in attendance to discuss their research plan which has been formulated through the Theory of Change. This is a structured process to collaborate on social innovation. He began the session by detailing his background and his passion for Universities and the impact they can have. He illustrated six broad societal challenge areas that will take focus; sustainability and the environment, health and wellbeing inequalities, the Covid recovery decade, globalisation and internationalisation, openness, equity and leadership in education and finally space, exploration and exploitation.

15.2 He then outlined the collaborative approach that this research project will take. To help determine the challenges the research team will focus on, they are listening to everyone who cares about the University. They believe that everyone has a voice in this process, irrespective of research experience. He clearly stated that the OU societal challenges will be owned by everyone who has ever studied, worked or collaborated with the OU. The next phase of the research is the OU Societal Challenges Listening and Discovery Phase and is open for student comments over Summer 2021. He asked the CEC to submit their ideas so they have as many voices as possible helping to shape the OU's research. Between July and October there will be consultations, allowing staff and students to contribute ideas.

15.3 There were ongoing discussions surrounding issues that are important to students, with digital poverty proving most important. In order to raise engagement with the

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survey and consultations, CEC recommended targeting students at Freshers, Student Voice Week and Student Hub Live.

## **16. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION 50<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY PLANS**

- 16.1 The President and the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator ran this workshop to gather ideas from the CEC relating to the Association's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday next year. The CEC were split into breakout rooms and fed back some great ideas.
- 16.2 **ACTION:** Expressions of interest to be part of a working group were to be given to the President and Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator. A working group to be then set up to implement ideas and plans for the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<b>SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE</b>
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## **17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### 17.1 Gender Critical Research Network

The Open FAR raised this issue within CEC to make them more aware of the ongoing situation. The President outlined how she had been working closely with OU Pride and the OU LGBTQ staff network to show the Association's support. A statement was released a couple of weeks ago which was well-received by students affected by this matter. The OU Pride Chair updated the CEC, explaining that the statement from the VCE however, didn't go down well with students as it lacked meaning and empathy. She stated that the students are looking for action, not words. The CEC gave their support to Lyndsay and all the students affected by this ongoing issue, recognising that voices are stronger together.

### 17.2 'Divorce Bill' for Student Volunteers

VP EDI presented her idea of a 'divorce bill'. This proposed 'bill' would be a formal agreement for volunteers and representatives who resign or end their active term with the Association to waive admin or moderator rights within Association spaces, and to agree a non-disclosure exit clause.

**ACTION:** Due to running out of time, the President asked for VP EDI to bring this idea to Teams for further discussions and also raise it as a paper for the October CEC.

**ACTION:** VP Student Support took her AOB regarding nightline for feedback in the Teams forums.

## **18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

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- 18.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of the 8 – 10 October 2021.

<b>Action Log</b>		
<b>Item in the Minutes</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Action holder</b>
12.10	Discussions around the Annual Membership Survey to take place on Teams. Comments and feedback to be received by the Strategy and Research team.	All CEC members
16.2	Expressions of interest to be part of the 50 <sup>th</sup> birthday working group to be sent to the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator. A working group to be set up after this.	All CEC members, Sue Maccabe