



CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC) 25 September – 6 October 2020 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 25 September – 6 October 2020 and via Microsoft Teams on 3 October 2020.

PRESENT

Ray Adcock - Area Association Representative (AAR) for Europe Patrice Belton - Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Ian Cheyne – Deputy President Lorena Fontan-Grana - Area Association Representative (AAR) for Wales Gareth Jones - Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Business & Law (FBL) Sarah Jones – President (Chair) Alison Kingan - Vice President Student Support Cinnomen McGuigan - Vice President Education Matt Porterfield - Vice President Administration Anca Seaton - Vice President Community Fanni Zombor - Vice President Engagement

IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Avann – Chief Executive Wendy Burrell – Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) (part) Gabriella Cull – Executive Support Assistant (minutes) Sue Maccabe – Strategy Change and Projects Coordinator (part) Dan Moloney – Policy and Public Affairs Manager (part) Sandra Summers – QER Joint Student Lead (item 11) Barbara Tarling – QER Joint Student Lead (item 11) Leanne Quainton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the October 2020 meeting – the first one of the new CEC term.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Verity Saunders – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Wellbeing, Education, Language Studies (WELS)

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

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 07/20/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 25 September – 6 October 2020

1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

CEC 10/20/1

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION CEC 10/20/2 GROUPS

2.1 Both the DSG and PLEXUS Groups had failed to supply their reports for the last quarter, despite regular reminders from the Head of Student Support and knowledge of report deadlines. Members of the CEC expressed their disappointment, hoping that this was a one-off occurrence on this occasion and would expect Groups to report to the CEC for future meetings.

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES

- 3.1 VP Admin commented on the intention of the Christian Union to apply to become a society rather than a club. He stated that he had no immediate concerns but if an application was received, he would be in favour of this coming to the CEC for scrutiny under 15.8 of the Bye-laws. VP Education was in favour of the Open University Christian Union (OUCU) becoming a Society if they met the criteria and to encourage the 'open to all' message that we should be displaying.
- 3.2 The AAR Europe had a number of queries regarding this paper. Bye-law 15.13 put membership thresholds on maintenance of affiliation status and required that societies 'maintain at least 25 members within a year of affiliation and 40 members within two years of affiliation in order to remain affiliated'. Some of the societies listed (e.g. ballet and opera and mountaineering) did not appear to meet these number criteria. VP Admin supported these concerns and stated that he has been worried by the lack of scrutiny of Societies for a while. He added that whilst he doesn't want any societies to collapse, they do need more active support and guidance.
- 3.3 The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance and Resources) amended some of the figures shown in the report that were inaccurate and re-published the appendices for the CEC.

- 3.4 VP Education outlined that in her prior role as Societies Committee Chair there had been numerous meetings about how to secure the status of some of the smaller societies and in some cases, they had been helped by offering cross-community support, in other cases Facebook or social media numbers had been taken into account for membership purposes. Whilst there are issues which still need to be carried forward, the Association will continue to best support the community spaces, which are so vital during this period of isolation.
- 3.5 VP Community understood these comments and recognised that the processes could be made more transparent, however, she made it clear that the Association wouldn't want to lose the compassion, support and guidance for societies. She highlighted the vital importance that Societies can play in the student journey.
- 3.6 It was agreed that in future the paper should be co-signed by VP Community as well as the Head of Community to provide assurance of CEC oversight.

4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT

CEC 10/20/4

4.1 The CEC were pleased to see that despite graduations being cancelled, the revenue from trading was still increasing. VP Community highlighted that she was looking forward to working with other CEC members, Association staff and volunteers to promote the shop at online events and keep the momentum going.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Taken on the Forum Meeting between 25 September – 6 October 2020

5. RECEIVED: BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT

CEC 10/20/5

- 5.1 VP Student Support recognised that the report refers to both the current and previous BoT but that it isn't clear which BoT was responsible for which aspects of the report. She made a suggestion for when the next BoT come into term, for this report to be split into two sections to differentiate between the two Boards. The Chief Executive apologised for the confusion, outlining that almost all of the report refers to the previous Board's final meeting on 24 July 2020. The extension to pandemic contingency leave was the first decision made by the new Board and was made in August 2020.
- 5.2 Under the Board minutes from 24 July 2020 at para 5.6, an advisory group was suggested for the governance and decision making of the OU Students Shop. VP Community asked whether there was an update on this. The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance and Resources) responded to explain that this is something they had not yet had chance to progress due to the focus on the closure of the subsidiary and the transfer of the operation to the Association. She explained that the Head of Operations would pick this up as soon as possible.

6.0 RECEIVED: CULTURE CHANGE PROJECT

- 6.1 VP Engagement asked whether the list of charity consultants includes consultancies with higher education and/or student union specialism. The Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) confirmed that the list of consultants did include both of these.
- 6.2 A suggestion was then raised by the FBL FAR on the composition of the working group. The President confirmed that everyone on the Culture Review Implementation Group was chosen to ensure there was diversity and variety in the group with a mixture of staff, Trustees, CCRs and CEC Members. The Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) outlined that in the group's terms of reference it was made clear that others can be co-opted for different projects or particular areas if required. She explained that this was done to provide opportunities for others to be involved and to widen the pool of experience and knowledge as the work progresses.

7. RECEIVED: INTERNATIONAL DISTANCE LEARNING STUDENT CEC 10/20/7 NETWORK INFORMATION

- 7.1 VP Engagement initially raised concern with this paper but following further discussions with the Policy and Public Affairs Manager she explained that she felt reassured.
- 7.2 VP Education acknowledged the exciting opportunities which might come from this. She looks forward to seeing where this leads and being more involved in looking at how academic representation across the world compares. VP Community stated interest in liaising with community-type reps from other Student Unions so that best practice can be shared.

8. RECEIVED: WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

CEC 10/20/8

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

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Taken on 3 October via Microsoft Teams

9. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

- 9.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator introduced this paper to the CEC in order to give updates on Performance Management and the Strategy Projects Portfolio., She also sought CEC feedback on the strategy projects initiation priorities for the next tranche.
- 9.2 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator gave updates on the tracking of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Processes had been put in place for the tracking and reporting of the KPIs, and each metric had been assigned an owner who is responsible for the collation and provision of the metric data. While all of the processes had been put in place, the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator recognised that

work is still required on some of the metrics. Following this discussion, there was an update on the Strategy Projects Portfolio. It had been agreed with the Trustees to incorporate the Culture Change projects into the portfolio. These had now been added and therefore the number of projects had increased from 10 to 14 to include the following Culture Change projects: Commissioning an external Governance review, developing 'one-team' working, devising an agenda which focuses on our core values and developing and implementing an action plan which advances Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the Association's policies and ways of working. The Culture Change projects will be led by the Culture Change Working Group and similarly, the EDI metric will be driven by the new EDI working group.

- 9.3 The CEC were then asked to discuss the strategy projects initiation priorities for the next tranche of work. The following three projects had been proposed to be in the next wave:
 - Project 4 = Mapping the student journey from registration to graduation. This will look at the touch points for engagement, support etc and maintaining dialogue throughout the whole journey.
 - Project 5 = Creating Student Engagement. This project aims to look at the student engagement ladder in order to improve overall engagement levels.
 - Project 6 = Looking at how we can work better with OU stakeholders, specifically focusing on how they can signpost students and raise the Association's profile and awareness.
- 9.4 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator sought CEC feedback on whether they agreed that these projects should be the next priorities and would endorse these recommendations to the Trustees. VP Engagement highlighted that project 6 was different from other projects, as a lot of things are already ongoing, such as an Association support presentation slide being used at the end of students' tutorials. She went on to outline a need for student representatives to share their experiences of what they are doing and that project 6 is about bringing these good practices together and formalising them. This project should be used to identify gaps and create a joint agreement with the OU, to create a standard of how things should be done. A formal agreement would ensure that the Association's expectations were being met.
- 9.5 The FBL FAR agreed that projects 4, 5 and 6 should be the next group to go ahead but raised concern over the amount of CEC resource required especially while the CEC had a number of vacancies subject to the outcome of the by-election. Workload was also raised as a concern for other members of the CEC. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator outlined that projects already initiated are currently resourced and she will be going out for expressions of interest for these next ones. It was noted that these projects don't have to be limited to just CEC and staff but can also include CCRs and go out for student recruitment if necessary. However, she also agreed that continuing vacancies on the CEC was an issue for our capacity to deliver and this concern would be flagged to Trustees alongside the recommendation to initiate these projects.
- 9.6 **RESOLUTION:** The CEC voted in favour of taking projects 4, 5 and 6 ahead. This endorsement would be passed on to Trustees, with an additional flag around the concerns over capacity.

10. STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT

CEC 10/20/10

- 10.1 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator introduced this paper, explaining that this was the first live report following feedback on the prototype at the last meeting. This report therefore updated on the KPIs and metrics together with information on the strategy projects and staff team business plans.
- 10.2 The FBL FAR focused on metric 4 and asked whether it was possible to have month to month data. The current quarterly data provided could be skewed due to events happening at the time, for example June and July would have seen a greater increase in visitors to the website and other forms of engagement due to Conference. He outlined that when looking year on year, figures could look like a failure, meaning that drawing comparisons would be difficult to do. VP Engagement illustrated that the July analytics paper contained a lot of this information and further added that the Digital Optimisation Officer aimed to do these analytics every 6 months. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator will follow up with the Digital Communications team.
- 10.3 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator gave updates on the projects which were currently in progress. She recommended that Project 1, the Annual Membership Survey, be moved back due to wanting to wait for the final results from the soft-launch before conducting this survey on a larger data set.
- 10.4 **RESOLUTION**: The CEC agreed with this recommendation.
- 10.5 Following this, the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator gave an update on the staff team business plans. She recognised that the first review happened only 5 weeks into the academic year so there was not much to report in some areas and the business plans for the next quarter would be more detailed.
- 10.6 This report would now go to the Trustees for feedback and so the CEC were asked whether there were any issues they wanted to flag to the Trustees.

11. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT REVIEW

CEC 10/20/11

11.1 Barbara Tarling and Sandra Summers were in attendance to introduce this item as the Joint Lead Student Representatives for the Quality Enhancement Review (QER). The Open University will be undergoing this review in March 2021, carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The last assessment, albeit under a different methodology. took place in 2015. Barbara outlined that this was a different form of review for the Open University as the QER methodology was developed to meet the requirements of the HEFCW (the funding body in Wales). The OU had agreed with the Office for Students (OfS) that this would form the main method to review the institution from now on as it meets requirements for all four nations of the UK and was felt to be the best 'fit'. Whilst the reviewing method is different to that in 2015, the aims are still the same. The main differences were placing a greater importance on learning as a partnership between the OU and students. It wants to look at how students are involved in improving how they want to learn i.e. through assessments and curriculum. Ultimately, it wants to see that student voice is being heard, in order for students to contribute to the student learning experience.

- Barbara went on to explain that students can be involved in different ways. Some 11.2 students have already been contacted directly for their input into the OU submission as it was passed through different committees. Additionally, the representative body of students at the institution are able to submit a separate student submission, with the only two requirements being that it has to focus on the same broad areas chosen by the OU itself and that all information has to come from previous research. In our context, this student submission was to be produced by the Association as the representative body. The themes chosen were: Student Success, Open Access and Student Voice, with an additional section on Covid-19. The purpose of the student submission is to highlight what it is like to be a student at the OU and how views are reflected in processes. As part of the submission, the QER Working Group were also keen to experiment with putting together a video of what it is like to be a student at the OU, assisted by the Digital Communications team. This was not a requirement and would only be submitted with the submission if we are content with the end product and feel it adds value. This had been a highly collaborative piece of work to get to this stage of the written submission.
- 11.3 The CEC praised the efforts of Barbara and Sandra in particular, and the wider working group in addition for their assistance with this piece of work. VP Community particularly highlighted the effective way it had been written in plain English, resulting in a document which is easy to understand.
- **11.4 RESOLUTION**: The CEC were all very pleased with the student submission and it was approved for submission to the Trustees for final sign off. The CEC recorded their thanks to Barbara Tarling and Sandra Summers for their hard work on producing an excellent submission.

12. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION WELSH MANIFESTO POLICY POSITIONS

- 12.1 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager presented this paper which he had jointly authored with the Wales AAR. The intention of the paper was to obtain agreement over the policies that will be included in an OU Students Association Welsh Election Manifesto for the devolved elections in May 2021. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager gave context about creating influence during big elections, outlining that the main reason to have a manifesto was that OU students in Wales are directly impacted by the actions and decisions of the Welsh government and have a lot to gain or lose from these elections. It is therefore in the Students Association's interest to attempt to influence the parties and politicians taking part in the elections. It's also important to recognise that the OU has increasing numbers of students in Wales due to the Diamond reforms and so it is important to try to engage to ensure that their voices are heard. Consequently, there's a critical need to keep pushing for more for the students in Wales.
- 12.2 There were five suggested policy positions that the OU Students Association Welsh Election Manifesto will contain. It was thought vital to consolidate the policy improvements Wales had seen over the last few years and avoid any backwards steps, therefore the first policy was to keep the reforms implemented under the Diamond Review. It is crucial to maintain the Diamond Review reforms in part-time

higher education, as this review helped to see the introduction of maintenance loans for part-time students in 2018.

- 12.3 The second policy was to increase the maintenance loan for part-time students in line with inflation/the cost of living. A failure to do this would see a decrease in the amount of funding part-time students receive and could affect student recruitment numbers.
- 12.4 The third policy position was to raise the cap on the maximum childcare grant for parttime students in line with inflation/the cost of living. Parents who are part-time students in Wales are also able to benefit from a Childcare Grant, which isn't currently available to part-time students in England. We would therefore like to not only ensure that it is retained under the next government, but also that it is increased in line with inflation/the cost of living to ensure that parents are not excluded from accessing or continuing their education.
- 12.5 The next policy covered introducing legislation to address digital exclusion in rural and socially deprived areas. The lack of decent broadband is a major barrier to accessing part-time and distance-learning education in Wales. Consequently, the Association will be making an argument that the Welsh education sector and economy overall would benefit from an investment in ensuring that everyone in Wales has access to reliable broadband internet that will enable better connectivity and opportunities, whilst reducing social isolation at the same time.
- 12.6 The fifth and final policy position was to improve access for those people with protected characteristics, by breaking down the barriers to higher education. Further to the recent commitments the OU students Association made in its statement regarding Black Lives Matter to embed equality considerations into all of our processes, this policy seeks to provide a national understanding of systematic barriers to access and participation and begin a conversation about how those barriers can be broken down.
- 12.7 The AAR Europe thanked the Policy and Public Affairs Manager and AAR for Wales, for their time in constructing this paper. He outlined that the proposals appear logical, well thought out and student focussed, and therefore supported this paper.
- 12.8 VP Student Support raised concern over how the Association would stay apolitical. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager stated that we would not be supporting any political party but taking policy positions which will help improve the lives of students, subsequently taking an apolitical stance. VP Engagement agreed, explaining that we can stay apolitical whilst talking to different political parties as our focus is on policy rather than politics. She outlined that this is a good exercise for the Association to be more comfortable in these situations and also a good starting point for other nations to be included too in time. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager said that with byelections coming up soon, a new rep should be in position for Scotland and with this, he hopes for a Scottish Manifesto following conversations with the newly elected AAR Scotland.
- 12.9 VP Engagement then raised the issue of the removal of funding for EU students which is coming into effect next year. She recognised that this was a good opportunity to try and keep loans for EU students in Wales and potentially could be included as an

additional policy position. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager confirmed that he would conduct some more research on this.

12.10 **RESOLUTION:** The CEC approved this paper.

13. CONFERENCE 2020 EVALUATION REPORT

- 13.1 This evaluation report, produced by the Research and Information Officer and presented by the Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement), evaluated the responses from the survey given to delegates who attended Conference 2020.
- 13.2 The Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) highlighted that on the weekend of 24 26 June 2020, the Association's Conference took place, but it was very different from previous years with it being held fully online. This event had to be put together very quickly, and all plans had to be changed last minute, following the news that Covid-19 would prevent any face to face events going ahead. Within just 12 weeks a successful online Conference was put together with an exciting and extensive programme of key speakers, workshops, networking opportunities and wellbeing sessions to name just a few. 411 students attended the online Conference and 175 students completed the delegate survey. There was a lot of positivity and engagement in the responses with 85% of students being satisfied with their first Conference and 82% recommending to others.
- 13.3 Communications had been well-received and the regular newsletters and emails from the Students Association were successful. The most popular channels through which delegates heard about Conference was emails from the Students Association (79%) and the Association website (45%). Similar to 2018 there was also a dedicated Conference microsite which hosted details about the programme, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and information about the business. As the weekend drew closer, engagement increased. This is shown by the open rate for the newsletters increasing from 45% for the first newsletter sent out in May to 85.8% for the one sent on 25th June. Overall, there was high satisfaction with the communications around Conference; 89% of respondents said they were happy with the frequency of communications and 83% agreed with the statement 'I found it helpful to receive the daily email over the Conference weekend'.
- 13.4 Delegate feedback was also positive on the registration process with 93% of survey respondents agreeing to the statement 'there was clear information about how to apply for a place at Conference' and 94% voting that the registration process was quick and easy. Whilst there were initial concerns over how to communicate the condition of Conference (voting in the business beforehand), the survey actually indicated that it was easy to understand with 95% of survey respondents agreeing to the statement that 'there was clear information on the need to participate in Conference business to be eligible to attend the Conference weekend'. Voter turnout was particularly good this year with an 80.89% voter turnout rate in the business the highest voting percentage the Association has ever seen. Overall, 347 votes were cast. The business forums however, were not well used with only a small percentage taking part in them. There is therefore a need to look at the reasons behind this.

- 13.5 When looking at the demographic breakdown of attendees, it showed that Conference 2020 engaged a lot of new students with 65% attending for the first time. Of those who attended for the first time, 49% of students hadn't previously attended any Association event. The delegate profile for 2020 changed considerably in terms of disability, with the number of delegates with a declared disability dropping from 42% in 2018 to 28% in 2020. This is an important statistic to assess and it could raise concerns about accessibility for online events.
- 13.6 There was huge support for this year's programme. It was also designed differently to previous years as it was aligned to three key themes Education, Inspiration and Wellbeing. The Coffee and Consultation sessions were successful and likewise were the sessions with key speakers. 95% of students attended all the key speakers, with Professor Brian Cox, Michael Irwin and Professor Monica Grady proving most popular.
- 13.7 Overall, there was a lot of useful feedback from this delegate survey and some recommendations were put forward to the CEC to discuss. These included; accessibility requirements, ensuring chat function works on the chosen platform, further support with Guidebook and Teams starting earlier in advance, and ensuring new students feel they are actively invited to interact.
- 13.8 The CEC gave formal thanks to the Steering Committee, to the Conference Project Manager Amy Undrell, all staff and everyone else involved in the preparation of Conference 2020.
- 13.9 The AAR Europe applauded everyone involved in the Conference but looked to the future and questioned whether there was a need for a blended approach in future Conferences. The FBL FAR supported this argument, outlining that a face to face Conference creates a huge cost to the Association of £200,000 to benefit around 400 students coming to campus whereas an online event could be opened up to many more students. The Chief Executive agreed that a different format in the future should be adopted and explained that the OU is increasingly focusing on our subvention and the Conference expense continues to be highlighted. He suggested that as part of the governance review, Conference needs to be looked at as it is a big financial pressure when thinking about value for money.
- 13.10 A number of CEC members disagreed, stating that they would not want to remove the face to face aspect. The future of Conference will be a bigger discussion and will continue as we look forward to 2022.

14. MODULE RESULTS

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

15. MODULE MATERIALS

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

CEC 10/20/15

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 16.1 <u>University Secretary</u>: Dave Hall, the new University Secretary joined the CEC for an introductory session about his role at the OU and his own background. He congratulated all the students who were new into their role and explained that he too, had only recently started four days before lockdown and since then had led the Coronavirus Contingency Planning group within the University. He described his first few months as a whirlwind, with having to steer through a pandemic and the CSR implementation. The University Secretary then went on to explain his different roles within the University such as Secretary to Council, Head of Professional Services and being a part of the planning coordination group to name just a few. His aim is to make sure that the University's professional services are effective and to try to ensure colleagues work across boundaries to ensure efforts are joined up across different departments.
- 16.2 He acknowledged that the Association's strategy and performance management was impressive and asked what the priorities were and the ways in which the OU could help. VP Engagement explained that the promotion of the Association is one of the main priorities as she highlighted the need for greater awareness among students and support from the OU is needed to achieve this. It was agreed that support from the OU to advertise our services more widely would be beneficial, recommending that a leaflet from the Students Association could be printed and put in each students' book parcels and a much greater focus placed on the student community in the University's marketing and promotional efforts. Increased support from the OU to better support representatives was also highlighted to enable them to feel more confident and encouraged when in Committee Meetings. Dave asked to see an Academic Governance overview of current Central Committee Representatives so that he can identify where more support can be given.
- 16.3 **ACTION:** VP Education to send Academic Governance overview to the University Secretary for him to see where more support can be given.
- 16.4 The Chief Executive also illustrated that it would be good to see moves made to recognise and change the approach to governance and student engagement in projects with greater recognition that most students work and have family and caring commitments and cannot attend meetings in Milton Keynes inside working hours without taking leave etc. The University Secretary thanked everyone for their welcome and insight.
- 16.5 <u>Student Voice Week</u>: VP Engagement asked the CEC if they could look within their areas and see if they can run a session for student voice week such as a consultation for example. Anyone with availability to run a session was asked to get in contact with VP Engagement.

- 16.6 This item was of a confidential nature and has therefore been reserved to the confidential section of the minutes.
- 16.7 The annual CEC dinner, which would normally be held in January, will not go ahead due to the current Covid-19 situation. The President asked for the CEC to approve a delay until October 2021 by which time it was hoped big face to face events would be permitted.
- **16.8 RESOLUTION**: The CEC agreed to delay the annual dinner to October 2021.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

17.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of the 22 – 24 January 2021.