



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
19 – 21 July 2019
MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held on the weekend of 19 – 21 July 2019 at Kents Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT

Cath Brown – President (Chair)
Mark Cameron – Area Association Representative Scotland
Caroline Cowan – Vice President Administration
Peter Cowan – Vice President Education
Cherry Day – Vice President Equality & Diversity
Billy Docherty – Faculty Association Representative Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)
Amelia Gackowska – Vice President Student Voice
Michail Kasoutas – Area Association Representative Continental Europe
Alison Kingan – Vice President Student Support
Matt Porterfield - Faculty Association Representative Business & Law (FBL)
Wendy Reid – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland (part)
Lucy Richardson – Area Association Representative Wales
Anca Seaton – Vice President Community
Steph Stubbins – Deputy President
Fanni Zombor – Vice President Media and Campaigns

IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Avann – Chief Executive
Heather Bloomer – Head of Digital Communications (part)
Sam Burge – Observer, FASS/England
Wendy Burrell – Deputy Chief Executive (Student & Staff Engagement) (part)
Amanda Ellis – Observer, FASS/England
Claire Wallace – Observer, Board of Trustees
Sam Harding – Head of Student Voice (part)
Magda Hadrys – Head of Operations
Mark Humphries – Observer, FASS/England
Sam Kenealy – Digital Communications Officer (part)
Alison Lunn – Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources)
Leah McDougall – Digital Communications Optimisation Officer (part)
Kimberley Pulling – Observer, Societies
Leanne Quainton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare (minutes)
Kathy Richardson - Carer

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the July meeting, giving a special welcome to the observers in attendance; Kimberley Pulling, Claire Wallace, Amanda Ellis, Mark Humphries and Sam Burge. She also welcomed two new members on the staff team; Leah McDougall, Digital Communications Optimisation Officer and Sam Kenealy, Digital Communications Officer who were attending as part of their inductions.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Sarah Jones – Faculty Association Representative Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS) (meeting only, not online forum items)

Danielle Smith – Area Association Representative England (meeting only, not online forum items)

Barbara Tarling – Student OU Council Member (meeting only, not online forum items)

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 04/19/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

1. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CEC 07/19/1

1.1 The AAR Scotland reported on the SPARQS (Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland) Conference that he had recently attended and the working groups he will subsequently be joining that will be looking at developing a mental health tool kit and another looking into how student analytics and data is used. The President praised the two Scottish initiatives both funded by SPARQS.

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS CEC 07/19/2

2.1 The President queried the PLEXUS Plus membership and asked for reassurance that Association funding would not be used for non-Association members. It was confirmed that this would not be the case and the idea was to build up a network of contacts

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across different Universities to connect and share good practice across the LGBT+ community.

2.2 ACTION: VP Equality & Diversity and FASS FAR to feed back to PLEXUS

3. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES **CEC 07/19/3**

4. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT **CEC 07/19/4**

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

5. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT, RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT **CEC 07/19/5**

5.1 This paper was taken online, prior to the meeting.

5.2 The CEC discussed the idea for a proposed role providing support to Post Graduate Research Students (PGRs) which would support those who have English as a second language. The OU Council Member and the President raised concern over the risk of ensuring the service offered was adequate and suggested that this service should fall within the OU rather than the Association seeking to fill any gap in provision.

6. RECEIVED: PEER SUPPORT SERVICE **CEC 07/19/6**

7. RECEIVED: ANALYTICS **CEC 07/19/7**

7.1 VP Media and Campaigns added that the data in the paper will help the Digital Communications team in looking at ways they can improve communications and will give them the opportunity to experiment with different channels. The data will feed into the work on the Communications Strategy.

8. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES **CEC 07/19/8**

8.1 This paper was taken online, prior to the meeting

8.2 VP Education gave a formal vote of thanks to External Trustee Andrew Hulme who was stepping down from his position on the Board of Trustees (BoT) after five years.

8.3 VP Education raised that changes to the Bye-Laws were required but not mentioned in this report. It was clarified that those would be covered under the discussion under incorporation.

8.4 A query was raised about when the External Affairs role in the staff team might be in place. The Chief Executive clarified that he will be working with the OU's Governance & External Affairs Team once the strategy had been finalised, to help scope out the role. The intention is to have the role filled by December/January.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

9. RESOURCE FOR OU STAFF REGARDING ASSOCIATION SERVICES CEC 07/19/9

- 9.1 This paper was taken online, prior to the meeting.
- 9.2 VP Student Support reported on her recent visits to various SRSCs (Student Recruitment and Support Centres) across the UK to talk to the OU facing staff about the services offered by the Association. The paper proposed creating a resource about the different services offered by the Association that can be accessed by OU staff when talking to students.
- 9.3 The CEC welcomed the idea and thought that incorporating other Association services such as student voice and community would be beneficial. It was suggested that bite sized chunks of different areas may be preferable rather than adding additional information to the existing presentation.
- 9.4 **ACTION:** VP Student Support to investigate with the SRSCs around the best format to use and to take the idea forward.

10. CULTURE CHANGE & RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS CEC 07/19/10

- 10.1 The Deputy President and Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) updated on the progress of the pieces of work being carried out by the working group around culture change within the organisation.
- 10.2 Quotes had been received from three organisations to carry out the external review of the Association's culture and the working group will soon be making a recommendation and a bid for funding to the BoT. If it is approved, it is intended that the work will start in the Autumn.
- 10.3 The majority of the OU Students Association staff had completed the one or two-day Mental Health First Aid training. A team of Mental Health Champions had been established in the staff team and their first task was creating a mental health charter that will foreground the attitudes and behaviours that they would want to encourage. The training facilitator has advised that a bespoke training package could be created for student volunteers if required. The appetite for this was discussed.
- 10.4 ACTION:** The majority of the CEC were interested in the training therefore the Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement) will come back to the CEC with dates and further information.
- 10.5 Another piece of work undertaken had been a review of the Association's Grievance and Complaints Procedure and a draft version was discussed. The changes were

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intended to make the procedure simpler and better defined that clearly detailed the expectations and consequences of any breach of expected conduct.

10.6 The CEC made a number of amendments to the draft document and asked for more detail or clarification in several areas.

10.7 ACTION: The Deputy Chief Executive (Student & Staff Engagement) to make the changes and post a further draft into the forum to continue discussions.

11. INCORPORATION

CEC 07/19/11

11.1 The Chief Executive gave an update on the progress of incorporation advising that the effective date remains on course for 1 August 2019. Registration had been approved with the Charity Commission in England and Wales and an application had been made with OSCR (The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator). The minutes from the first Board meeting of The Open University Students Association Ltd that took place on 13 June 2019 were now available on the website.

11.2 The legal advisors were making some proposed amendments to the Bye-Laws, mainly re-ordering some of the content so that they are in-line with the new Articles of Association to enable the documents to be read and cross referenced together. The Bye-Laws will come back to the CEC and BoT for formal approval.

11.3 The CEC discussed how best to approach informing the student body once the process is completed after the transfer date. It was felt important to close the feedback loop following the Conference vote in 2018 however it was thought that because there would be no changes for students and their membership with the Association, a low key and small scale announcement would be preferred so as not to unnecessarily cause confusion.

11.4 RESOLUTION: It was agreed that communications should be celebratory but relatively low key. The website page would be left open for students to refer to until Conference 2020 when it will be formally reported as completed.

11.5 The CEC formally thanked and congratulated everyone involved including Tim O'Brien, Incorporation Project Manager, for getting the Association through the process in what has been a huge endeavour.

12. STUDENT SATISFACTION IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

CEC 07/19/12

12.1 The President and Deputy President had been tasked with constructing a revised Student Satisfaction Improvement Action Plan by SSIWG (Student Satisfaction Working Group) following the work of the group slowing down since the Student Satisfaction event in January 2019.

12.2 The CEC worked through the current action plan, suggesting a number of changes and additions to areas where student satisfaction can be more investigated/monitored. The President and Deputy President will take away and work into a revised version.

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- 12.3 VP Education suggested requesting that the Association had access to the NSS 'free text' answers as the survey is the main tool to gauge overall student satisfaction. The President will approach Kevin Mayles, the OU's Head of Strategic Analytics.
- 12.4 Others areas that were felt missing included better coordination and more targeted student communications; to look for new areas/opportunities for engagement; concentrate on data that is below benchmark and investigate what is being done about it and concentrate on the areas of good and bad practice; research looking into why students are and are not satisfied, following up with dropouts and when students request to switch tutors. Other areas suggested were to profile those students that are satisfied and what we can learn; to give a sense of belonging to students i.e. a goodie bag after registration; investigate the experience that students get when calling their SRSC; the inclusion of a timeline against all actions in the plan.
- 12.5 ACTION:** The President and Deputy President will input feedback into a revised draft version and post into the forum.

13. OUSTUDENTS.COM REVIEW CEC 07/19/13

- 13.1 VP Media and Campaigns advised CEC members of the planned review of the OU Students Association website which had been launched in September 2017. Feedback received had identified a number of issues that needed rectifying, including the organisation of the site, being able to find specific content and consistency in the layout and design.
- 13.2 The CEC welcomed the review and inputted further suggestions of improvements that they would like to see. These included the introduction of a site map, an improved events calendar, better search function, clearer links to the forums and more relevant homepage tab titles.
- 13.3 **ACTION:** The Digital Communications team will take comments away and keep the CEC informed of progress.

14 ASSOCIATION TRAVEL & SUBSISTANCE POLICY CEC 07/19/14

- 14.1 The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance and Resources) introduced the draft policy highlighting that a review had been conducted in order to provide more clarity and guidance about expenses. The policy was to provide additional guidance but also retained the flexibility needed for our diverse student organisation with different student needs. Comments had been taken on board from a CEC discussion held previously on the forum and this feedback had been included in the draft.
- 14.2 The proposed subsistence rates were based on the HMRC's benchmark scale which would still allow for flexibility when needed. Another proposed change was to alter the submission deadline for claiming expenses from six weeks to four to allow for better forecasting and reduce the risk of expenses being forgotten. The budget allocation for CEC members, which had been agreed with the BoT, was to retain individual expenses for the Officers and Council member with the AARs and FARs to remain at

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£1000 for each group, in addition to there being an overall contingency pot set aside to provide for flexibility if required.

- 14.3 The CEC discussed various sections of the policy which included a suggestion of adding a procedure for paying contactless and confirming that claiming breakfast for an overnight stay was permitted. It was queried whether the subsistence charges could be averaged out throughout the day and it was advised that it was not always possible to pay back an advance before requesting another if regular meetings were scheduled allowing for the time taken for the OU to refund expenses. It was also confirmed that Trainline would not refund an advance ticket if a cancellation was made so there was a conflict between requesting to book ahead and cancelling bookings.
- 14.4 The FAR and AAR budget was discussed as there remained concern that the budget would not be sufficient. The Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) assured that many expenses fall under other project headings and this budget is for ad-hoc expenses that could not be covered elsewhere. She advised that if expenses incurred were wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of duties with the Students Association then there should not be any issues.
- 14.5 ACTION:** Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) to take comments on board and make the necessary changes to the policy and re-post in the forum for final approval.
- 14.4 The CEC thanked the Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) and VP Administration for the work done into what was a difficult piece of work.

15 STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CEC 07/19/15

- 15.1 This paper was taken online, prior to the meeting.
- 15.2 The CEC discussed the risks associated with putting on a Leadership Conference and whether there was appetite and a requirement for such an event. Queries were raised around student/staff facilitation, the overall benefit for the resource involved and the overall cost. A suggestion was that a training session could be given as part of an already established volunteer event which this could form part of. There was also concern over unfairness in offering election candidates training at a face to face session for any that could not attend.
- 15.4 The CEC had mixed views on whether the proposal was worth further scoping out and gauging an idea of the costs that would be involved in putting on an event or if priorities and resources should be focused elsewhere. Discussions would continue in the forum.

16. YOUR IDEAS CEC 07/19/16

- 16.1 As part of developing ways in which the Students Association can both better understand its membership and act on student interest, Head of Student Voice and the Digital Communications Optimisation Officer demonstrated a new 'Your Ideas'

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platform, similar to the OU's Student Ideas, that if approved by the CEC would be launched to allow students to submit and vote on ideas. If submissions reached a threshold they would be discussed by the CEC.

- 16.2 The CEC thought it was a fantastic idea and agreed that it offered a new form of engagement allowing students to have an impact on what the Association focuses on.
- 16.3 The CEC asked for the appropriate wording to be added on the site to ensure expectations could be managed of what is achievable and meets our charitable objectives. VP Education reported that the Bye-Laws stated that 50 students voting would mean a policy review and this level seemed to be a realistic benchmark for this platform. It was thought that more 'simple ideas' could be made to a group of CEC/Staff to assess with the higher level going to CEC meetings.
- 16.4 The idea for phase two of the platform was to enable students to track their ideas allowing students to see how they were progressing and any reasons why progression had not happened. This would be investigated once take-up and usage was evaluated. It was intended that the Your Ideas platform would be running in time for Freshers in September.
- 16.5 ACTION:** A brief usage update report to come to every CEC.

17. REPRESENTATION REVIEW

CEC 07/19/17

- 17.1 The Representation Review, undertaken by VP Education, the Deputy Present and the Student Voice staff team as part of the 2017-20 Strategy had been the first substantive review on representation. Data was collected from committee members, wider OU staff, Central Committee Representatives (CCRs) and the wider student body and the scope was looking at central representation on academic governance groups. The full report of findings were presented as an appendix to the paper.
- 17.2 The President congratulated the team on a great piece of work. However she thought that some of the questions in the survey seemed to be leading and hoped it would not affect the credibility of the answers. She asked for the LER (Learning Experience Representatives) role to be refreshed as this role was intended to be the link for CCRs and FARs to get information from the wider student body which was a main feature in the report to ensure issues/comments taken to committees have more authority and credibility. She advised the STEM LERs had worked well however she was unsure across the other faculties.
- 17.3 A concern was raised that the same issues from CCRs appear to be being raised on a regular basis and it might look like the Association had not been acting on them. VP Education assured that now we have the evidence, the Association would be able to take forward these issues formally.
- 17.4 The Head of Student Voice will be meeting with PVC Students and the Student Voice Steering Group to see how work can be joined up and worked to address some of the issues highlighted.

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- 17.5 Discussions were had around the dissemination and sharing of information and the need for better mechanisms to allow CCRs to do it. It was agreed that a better culture of communication was required and the forums assigned to the CCRs are not organised well to promote the sharing of information cross-faculty. A suggestion was made of a central place to coordinate discussion for CCRs before they go into meetings with the relevant people and looking at how the Board of Studies do it and follow good practice.
- 17.6 Terms limits for CCRs was felt to be a good idea with a clearer definition of the role required.
- 17.7 The next steps were for the team to use the data to make some recommendations that will form the basis of a Code of Practice for student representation which will clarify the role of representatives on committees and support the Relationship Agreement. These will come back to a future CEC.

18. CONFERENCE STEERING COMMITTEE CEC 07/19/18

- 18.1 VP Community and the President brought forward some proposed changes to the Bye-Laws around the composition of the Conference Steering Committee, the body with the overall responsibility for the organisation of the Association's Conference. One of the updates required was the removal of the reference to 'National and Regional Association member' as these are now obsolete. The proposal suggested an addition to the composition of the Committee, by adding the Chair of Societies Committee due to the increasing role that the Societies play in Conference.
- 18.2 The CEC discussed the proposal, whilst also considering how the Groups are properly represented. It was thought that VP Equality & Diversity could represent the Groups but to ensure the composition was not CEC heavy and total numbers were manageable, the places for a CEC Elected nominee and President's nominee should be removed.
- 18.3 It was agreed that the new composition of the Conference Steering Committee would be:
- *ex officio*: President, VP Administration, VP Community
 - Five full members of the Association who are not CEC members
 - The Chair of Societies or their nominee from the Societies Committee
 - VP Equality & Diversity or their nominee
 - A recommendation to seek appropriate advice for accessibility should there not be a member on the committee with accessibility requirements.

19. REMITS REVIEW CEC 07/19/19

- 19.1 The President highlighted the process which happens every term of reviewing each CEC remit prior to the main election period and whether any adjustments are required for the 2020-22 term. The President had asked the CEC to comment on their particular remits by 16 August.

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19.2 It was thought that it was important to make it clear how many hours are required during the business hours in the week, not just focussing on having to attend campus. It also needs to be made clear how many meetings/projects the post holder had been involved with which were because of their role on the CEC or whether it was because they had a particular interest in that topic that they had volunteer for.

19.3 RESOLUTION & ACTION: It was agreed to seek views from outside of the CEC and the President will create a forum post on 'Talk To Your Students Association' to get student views. The forum link would to be shared with the volunteer database and put onto Slack.

19.4 ACTION: All CEC members to send their comments to the President by 16 August 2019.

20. CONFERENCE FUNDING OPTIONS

CEC 07/19/20

20.1 The Head of Operations gave a background to the paper stating the significant cost of Conference had been raised during this years subvention negotiations with the OU and it had been requested by PVC Students to look at how reductions could be made. The OU as an institution are having to reduce costs across a number of areas and the Association was required to look at cost savings prior to the 2019-20 negotiations. Work had been carried out by Amy Undrell, 2018 Conference Project Manager and Magda Hadrys, Head of Operations (and lead of the Conference Registration Team) into proposing some options for cost reduction and reducing attrition.

20.2 A lengthy discussion was had in regard to introducing refundable deposits and/or voluntary contributions. There was concern that some students would not be able to afford even a small deposit so this could disadvantage a number of students. It was requested that exemptions to these options be allowed. The process of any voluntary contribution would also have to be fully researched and would need a guide to show options to contribute. Whether contributions would be asked before or after the event would need to be established and it would need to be guaranteed that if asking before Conference it would have no effect on the ballot of attendees.

20.3 Ideas suggested included selling Conference 2020 branded T-Shirts to raise money; Giving something back for the deposit e.g. a Conference T-shirt once registered; Strengthen the terms and conditions of Conference to make it clear to those attending the cost of Conference and if a student doesn't attend without informing us, the Association will attempt to recover the costs; Fundraising events.

20.4 VP Media and Campaigns and the FBL FAR reported on a recent FBL Conference they had attended where expenses were paid, but attendees were required to request them rather than it being advertised. This had resulted in just a small number of attendees claiming for expenses. Although it was felt this could be possible, it wasn't sure how this would be perceived and how fair it would be. The team will investigate the feasibility of this further.

20.5 The issue of attendee drop-outs and the cost of empty hotel rooms each year was discussed. The Head of Operations advised that research shows that by adding just a small charge to an event does help combat this. She also advised of the difficulties the

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registration team have in filling the pre-allocated spaces each year and too much time spent on chasing these groups for attendees.

20.6 The OU's Development Team had offered assistance with investigating sponsorship and had suggested approaching companies who have a mutual benefit i.e. employability and careers. They had provided information on how to pitch sponsorship requests as well as the different levels of packages to offer.

20.7 ACTION and RESOLUTION: It was agreed:

- To discard the options of changing nothing in regard to Conference, full price tickets and discounted tickets.
- To explore further the idea of voluntary contribution and refundable deposits and allowing exemptions.
- To explore further the option of day tickets and how these will be treated e.g. how this would work with voting status in the business section.
- To explore further external sponsorship.
- To explore further the idea of reducing Conference numbers in line with the reduction in overall student numbers
- To explore the idea of offering expenses but not continuing to chase or advertise the fact.
- For the Conference Steering Committee to look into over or under booking hotel rooms to save costs in drop-outs.

20.7 **ACTION:** A further paper to come back to the October CEC.

21. STUDIO

CEC 07/19/21

21.1 VP Media and Campaigns highlighted that STUDIO is due for review and an update to its current format to ensure it is as effective as it could be in engaging with students. The proposal was to reposition the STUDIO brand as more of an umbrella for more media and content like podcasts and pre-records.

21.2 The CEC agreed with the issues identified of making content of more interest to the wider student community and that shorter shows would be preferable with more pre-records of services/information that students need e.g. Peer Support Service and mental health information.

21.3 VP Media and Campaigns advised that the volunteer role of STUDIO Volunteers was still required to ensure that an interested pool of students were available and willing to be involved when required. The CEC suggested rotating hosts and inviting more guests to keep the show varied.

21.4 A CEC Observer warned about the brand STUDIO as she had assumed that it was the OU's 'Open Studio' so recommended that the marketing and promotion of the show should be looked at. It was raised that perhaps a new brand would be needed to show the change to the past.

21.4 ACTION: The Digital Communications team to take comments away.

22. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION POLICY & POSITION STATEMENTS

CEC 07/19/22

- 22.1 The President highlighted the workshop at the October CEC where areas that the Association should have policy positions on were discussed and were subsequently agreed at the April CEC. The President had drafted position statements on recording of tutorials and online delivery for CEC to comment on.
- 22.2 RESOLUTION AND ACTION:** The CEC approved the sentiment of the statements and would email the President with any tweaks to wording. It was further agreed to call them position statements rather than policies.
- 22.2 It was agreed that CCRs should be using these position statements in Committee meetings. If they were to have different views, they should say so but explain that it is their personal view, not that of the Association.
- 22.3 These statements should have a place on the website and should be distributed to those that require it. It was thought important to be demonstrating that the Association is attempting to try change these areas, even if the OU are not necessarily implementing it.
- 22.4 A suggestion was made to create a booklet containing all Association's position statements. VP Education advised of the 'Green Book' that was used in 2012 and that we wouldn't want to return to such a position. He would however dig out the policy statements booklet which was agreed at Conference on 2011/12.
- 22.4 ACTION:** VP Education to post these policies for discussion in the forum.
- 22.5 ACTION:** An annual review cycle to be implemented to ensure position statements are kept up to date.
- 22.6 VP Student Support and VP Equality & Diversity are working on a policy for delays in alternative formats and will post in the forum or bring to the next CEC meeting for comment.

<p>SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE</p>
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23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 23.1 None reported.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 24.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of 25 – 27 October 2019.