



**CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
19 – 21 October 2018
MINUTES**

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held on the weekend of 19 – 21 October 2018 at Kent's Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT

Cath Brown – President (Chair)
Mark Cameron – Area Association Rep Scotland
Caroline Cowan – VP Administration
Peter Cowan – VP Education
Kat Cramond – VP Student Community
Claire Davey – Faculty Association Rep Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)
Cherry Day – VP Equality & Diversity
Billy Docherty – Faculty Association Rep Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)
Amelia Gackowska – VP Student Voice
Sarah Jones – Faculty Association Rep Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)
Michail Kasoutas – Area Association Rep Europe
Alison Kingan - VP Student Support
Wendy Reid – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland
Lucy Richardson – Area Association Rep Wales
Danielle Smith – Area Association Rep England
Steph Stubbins –Deputy President
Barbara Tarling – Student OU Council Member
Fanni Zombor – Vice President Media and Campaigns

IN ATTENDANCE

Wendy Burrell – Deputy Chief Executive
Kate Dungate – Head of Digital Communications (part)
Magda Hadrys – Head of Operations (part)
Sam Harding – Head of Student Voice (part)
Leanne Quainton – Executive Assistant (minutes)
Beth Metcalf – Head of Student Volunteering (part)
Allan Musinguzi – Representation Officer (part)
Verity Robinson – Head of Student Support (part)
Pooja Sinha – Research & Information Officer (part)
Beverley Woodbridge – Research Assistant (part)
Sammi Wright – Projects Officer (Student Support) (part)

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed CEC members to the first meeting of the 2018-20 term. She gave a special welcome to Caroline Cowan who had recently been elected as VP Administration in the recent By-Elections. Sammi Wright, Projects Officer (Student Support) and Allan Musinguzi, Representation Officer were also in attendance as part of their staff inductions.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Rob Avann – Chief Executive

Michael McCabe – Faculty Association Rep Business & Law (FBL)

C. MINUTES

C.1 The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 7/18/M) were approved.

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

D.1 None raised.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CEC 10/18/1

- 1.1 The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the regular report from the BoT, highlighting that one of the purposes of the Board of Trustees report is to help communication between the Board and CEC and an opportunity for members to raise any questions. She went through the report highlighting that the interviews for the Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) role were held on 11 October and Alison Lunn had been appointed and is due to start in early January 2019.
- 1.2 Following the By-Election results, Caroline Cowan had formally resigned from her Student Trustee position after her successful election to the VP Administration role. This means that there will be two student Trustee positions to fill in the next By-election in February 2019.
- 1.3 The Student OU Council Member voiced her disappointment about the proposal to investigate the recruitment of an external Returning Officer and the discussions around the proposals to recruit an external Chair of the BoT following Conference approving the motion to remove the duty on the President, and allowing the BoT to appoint a Chair. The President assured her that no decisions would be taken lightly and that

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investigations into the feasibility of having an external Returning Officer will be thorough. With regard to the issue of an external Chair of the BoT, this paper notes that no final decision can be reached until after the revised Constitution is approved at OU Council in November and this item will be further addressed at the December meeting of the BoT for a firm decision to be made. It was confirmed that the President will serve as Deputy Chair to the Board of Trustees regardless of the outcome of this further discussion.

2. NATIONAL STUDENTS SURVEY (NSS) RESULTS 2018 **CEC 10/18/2**

- 2.1 The CEC discussed the Association's next steps following the 2018 NSS results that showed a small improvement for both the Association and the University this year.
- 2.2 Agreement was reached to continue to raise more awareness of the NSS. Head of Student Voice spoke about the substantial work that had been done last year around raising awareness and understanding amongst the student body of the wording in the Student Union question: 'The Students Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students' academic interests' particularly around the phrase 'academic interests.' She recommended closing the feedback loop of this previous work before starting any further campaigning around the NSS as previous feedback received has yet to be acted on.
- 2.3 The CEC agreed that the 2018 Association's 'bank' questions were not particularly relevant and they would like further input into the wording of these for next year's survey. The Head of Student Voice will keep the CEC updated when these discussions are underway.
- 2.4 Some of the breakdown figures in this paper displayed areas where the Association had a lower reach than others and a suggestion was made that these areas should be explored and targeted further. The English AAR commented on the high number of students clicking 'neither' on the Association's questions that demonstrated a lot of ambivalence about the Association and it was agreed that further work around community building is required to further raise awareness.
- 2.5 Head of Student Voice reminded the CEC that these results should be used as evidence to support the Association in their discussions with the University, helping to ensure the OU are working to improve the student experience and in turn, their own NSS scores.
- 2.6 **ACTION:** The discussion will continue in the forum.

3. CONFERENCE 2018 **CEC 10/18/3**

- 3.1 The Conference Evaluation Report was presented by VP Education as a member of the Conference Steering Committee . It concluded that on the whole, Conference 2018 had been a big success but a number of recommendations were made to improve certain areas for 2020 which the CEC discussed further.
- 3.2 Improving non-attendance remains an ongoing challenge and although there was an improvement this year (14% non-attendance - 48 delegates), it was agreed that this

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figure could still be improved upon to enable more students to attend and to save on unnecessary hotel costs. It was thought that more publicity around the cost of each student attending Conference would help as a deterrent as there is an issue of free events carrying no responsibility therefore subject to drop outs. Over-booking hotels was again raised although it was agreed that this brings its own issues in regards to managing the uncertainty of being oversubscribed. Other suggestions included requesting deposits and barring those who have previously failed to turn up from attending other events but it was felt that the latter could be unintentionally discriminatory to some students. It was noted that the report made clear that delegates who had put themselves forward as Conference volunteers were much more likely to attend, which it was felt could be put down to them having a responsibility at the event and this could be something to explore further.

- 3.3 The Deputy President had received positive feedback about the Association workshops although the comment was made that because they were held simultaneously, it meant that students could not attend them all. The buddy system also worked well and it was felt that this should be a more formalised role in the future and that these volunteers should wear branded t-shirts to be better identifiable.
- 3.4 A future Steering Committee will be considering all of these issues and recommendations for Conference 2020.
- 3.5 The OU Student Council Member formally thanked the Steering Committee and Association Staff for a very successful Conference.

4. FITNESS TO VOLUNTEER POLICY

CEC 10/18/4

- 4.1 Head of Student Volunteering and the Deputy President presented the paper that proposed the creation of a Fitness to Volunteer policy in line with the work that the OU are doing in exploring fitness to study. It was noted that many Student Unions have policies in place that focus on ensuring there are procedures to support volunteers who have issues that affect their ability to performing in their role. The Head of Student Volunteering noted the extensive discussion that had recently taken place on the 'Talk to your Students Association' forum since the paper had been published. She reiterated that this paper was just asking for approval for the work to start on exploring this issue after which more research and advice would be undertaken prior to creating a draft policy that would come back to the CEC for further discussion.
- 4.2 The CEC discussed some of the difficulties around the details of a policy of this nature and while supporting the intention, emphasised the absolute requirement that it should be appropriately pitched. They debated around who might be responsible for making the decision to remove a volunteer through this policy and came to no clear answers. It was thought that to create a Panel for this purpose would have connotations of a disciplinary procedure which may deter students coming forward if they needed help. Head of Student Volunteering confirmed that removing a volunteer would be a last resort and support for an individual would be the initial step as a duty of care.
- 4.3 It was acknowledged that the policy would need to ensure that the balance is right between the support for students and what is in the interests of the Association. An attendee spoke about how they had benefited from this kind of policy when

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volunteering for another organisation and this included having been given a 'cooling off' period which had really benefitted their situation. Although the Association currently provides volunteers with this opportunity informally, the policy would formalise this procedure allowing us to be better equipped to deal with any difficult situations.

4.4 There were comments about the scope of the policy in relation to when an individual's fitness to volunteer causes concern as some of the examples detailed in the paper were felt to be subjective and it was understood that future criteria would need to be carefully considered and clearly defined.

4.5 **ACTION:** Head of Student Volunteering to post examples in the forum of other Student Unions Wellbeing/Fit for Volunteering policies.

4.6 **RESOLUTION & ACTION:** The CEC approved the continuation of this work. Head of Student Volunteering will be continuing to keep a watching brief on how the OU's 'Fitness to Study' policy is developing and will be carrying out further research into what other Student Unions are doing in this area as well as seeking advice from the Association's legal advisors to ensure that the wording and content of any future policy is appropriate.

4.7 **ACTION:** A draft of a 'Fitness to Volunteer' policy will be brought back for comment at the January CEC meeting.

5. INCORPORATION CEC 10/18/5

5.1 Unfortunately owing to illness, the Chief Executive was unable to be present to answer questions on the draft Articles of the Association and members were asked to forward any queries directly to him and the VP Administration directly following the meeting.

5.2 It was highlighted that references were made throughout the paperwork to 'advising' students which was felt to be incorrect and it was agreed that this wording should be amended.

5.3 **ACTION:** 'Advising' in paragraphs 4.2 and 5.9 and throughout the document to be rephrased.

5.4 **ACTION:** CEC Members to forward any comments or queries to the Chief Executive and VP Administration.

5.5 **ACTION:** The Chief Executive to share the Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee with the CEC for their information.

6. CEC USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CEC 10/18/6

6.1 VP Media and Campaigns and Head of Digital Communications provided a presentation on the use of social media and best practice for CEC members when using Facebook pages or profiles for their official accounts. They discussed the factors and uses of each, running through the benefits and disadvantages of the different

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Facebook options.

- 6.2 **ACTION:** Members who need support with their social media to contact VP Media and Campaigns or the Communications Team who will be able to provide advice.
- 6.3 **ACTION:** Head of Digital Communications to add a definitive list of all the CEC individual official accounts from the main Association Facebook page making them more easily accessible to new students.

7. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION STRATEGY CEC 10/18/7

- 7.1 The Deputy Chief Executive introduced the paper that summarised some key progress made against the strategy objectives since the last meeting. Many of the objectives have been completed and the President proposed that now the new term is well underway and CEC members established into their roles, that a review of current strategy was required. This review will be on the agenda at the next CEC meeting in January.
- 7.2 Members advised that they appreciated the form of update contained within this paper as a better way of understanding some of the key progress made since the previous meeting. It was suggested that a better mechanism could be found to allow members to feed into this regular update on Strategy.
- 7.3 **ACTION:** These comments to be fed into the future strategy review.

**8. CONTROLLER ADVISORY PANEL (CAP) MEMBERSHIP CEC 10/18/8
& FORUM GUIDELINES**

- 8.1 VP Education advised that the Forum Guidelines had been revised to reflect some election rules which related to restricting access to the elections and by-election forums to members of the Association. The composition and duties of CAP (Controller Advisory Panel) had also been clarified and role descriptions for CEC and Moderators members had been drafted.
- 8.2 **ACTION:** Amend wording in the CEC CAP Member essentials skills to read 'previous moderating experience or similar experience/skills on forums elsewhere'. It was understood that Moderator experience may not always be available amongst CEC members in the future and that similar experience or related skills would be acceptable.
- 8.3 The CEC queried for how long past students have access to the forum service and how it is apparent when non-members are posting comments. The Head of Operations advised that many alumni have indefinite access which cause issues for the Association. She explained that staff members carry out spot-checks on forums when inappropriate comments are being made and will remove users if found not to be a current member. The aim is that for certain Association forums (Talk to Your Students Association and the Elections forums) are retained as a safe space for Association members and for specified students groups only.

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- 8.4 Head of Operations described how a review of the forums had started last term and that this will recommence soon and will seek to streamline the number of forums as well as providing improved mapping so they are easier to find. Once members of CAP have been confirmed, this work will begin. It was noted that forum users, Moderators and CAP members will inform the review to ensure a collective approach into the changes required.
- 8.5 **ACTION:** VP Student Support will email minor amendments on the guidelines and role descriptions directly to VP Education.
- 8.6 **ACTION:** CEC Members who are interested in joining CAP should send a statement of interest to VP Education by 13 November 2018.

9. RESEARCH STRATEGY WORKSHOP CEC 10/18/9

- 9.1 The Research & Information Officer, Pooja Sinha ran a workshop on the Research Strategy that forms part of the Association's overall strategy objective: 'To further our approach to evidence-led decision making'. Pooja gave an overview of how research is carried out in the Association and how we work with the University's SRPP (Student Research Project Panel) on timings and topics. The research carried out within the Association focuses on two main aims; to evidence study related issues i.e. Module Delivery and to improve student experience within the Association i.e. the Volunteering Research recently completed.
- 9.2 The workshop focused on the mechanisms to prioritise research projects, what topics should be focused on, how the Association engages and understands the wider Higher Education sector and its issues as well as how we raise awareness of research and engage the wider student community.
- 9.3 The CEC fed in several ideas that included a number of suggestions for further research including module delivery, tuition, student experience of SSTs, elections, individual representation and post-grad fees.
- 9.4 **ACTION:** Feedback will be collated and a draft Research Strategy will return to a future meeting.

10. CEC EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW CEC 10/18/10

- 10.1 The Deputy Chief Executive ran through the results of the CEC Effectiveness Review that eight of the outgoing CEC had completed last term, giving their views on where improvements could be made.
- 10.2 The CEC agreed that the following changes should be implemented where possible:
- a) CEC papers to be collated and converted into one PDF and/or uploaded to the forum in a ZIP file.
 - b) Meeting timings to be adhered to and the Chair to be realistic on number of Agenda items during a meeting to allow for this.
 - c) More input and discussion from the CEC into any externally run workshops.

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- d) Officer Team Meetings have been disbanded but the new Project Meetings should provide a similar function that a smaller number of CEC/staff can attend if topic is relevant to their role.
- e) More use of Skype/Adobe Connect if needed in-between meetings. **AGREED** that Skype would be better for accessibility.
- f) Papers continue to be created by CEC members or staff members or as co-creations between both parties.
- g) Continue with boardroom style meeting set up.
- h) Papers continue to be posted two weeks prior to CEC meetings with later papers posted one week in advance.
- i) CEC Effectiveness Review to be completed after a year rather than at the end of terms and all CEC members required to complete it.

10.3 The President held a discussion about the CEC forums and how members should use them and the importance of everyone reading and contributing. The CEC suite of forums has been changed this term to include a 'feedback needed' forum that is for time sensitive requests that has been welcomed by the CEC.

It was agreed that further functions are required to be able to mark when posts have been read and agreed without the need for posting.

10.4 **ACTION:** OUSA Controller to be asked whether additional functions can be added. If this is not possible, VP Student Support will raise the issue at the next Service Review meeting.

11. OBSERVERS TO CEC MEETINGS

CEC 10/18/11

11.1 The President introduced the paper that was split into two parts that covered how we go about inviting student observers to CEC meetings and the proposal of inviting non-student observers. The intention was to be more flexible when inviting observers, maintaining the openness of the CEC and also giving potential future election candidates a chance to understand a little more about how the Association works.

11.2 The CEC discussed the option of observers being given priority if they have history of involvement in the Association in the event of more observers wishing to attend than spaces available.

11.3 **RESOLUTION:** Majority voted in favour for the above criterion to remain.

11.4 Members on the previous CEC as well as members present who had attended as an observer agreed that there had been too many observers at each meeting and that larger meetings had made discussions unmanageable. They agreed with the recommendation in the paper that suggested having fewer observers but to more meetings and felt that 4-5 places to each meeting was a more suitable number.

11.5 A member queried whether having only one place for an observer from England was proper representation; the President explained that the intention was to ensure that all nations are represented while remaining flexible enough to allow for more observers to be in attendance.

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- 11.6 It was noted that a Trustee observer is missing from the list. It was also noted that as the number of Association Groups grow, so would the need for more observers therefore this issue should be kept under review.
- 11.7 **RESOLUTION & ACTION:** Agreed that 4-5 observers attend each CEC meeting apart from the first October meeting of the term. All other proposals for Student observers were agreed and the President will redraft the policy for the January Meeting.
- 11.8 The discussion focused on the proposal for non-student observers. The OU Student Council Member advised that Council Members could be invited to an afternoon session of a CEC meeting if they were intending to attend the annual dinner. Suggestions about observers from the Associate Lecturer team, Open University staff and external bodies, for example other student unions were considered good ideas in principle. However there was a general consensus that inviting individuals to other events would better showcase the Association, for example a future Research or Student Voice Symposium.
- 11.9 **ACTION:** The President will put an invitation on OU Life to understand if there would be any interest shown in attending future CEC meetings from OU staff.

12. SST (STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM) ROADSHOWS CEC 10/18/11

- 12.1 VP Student Support reported on the meetings she had attended with the Head of Student Support where they presented to each of the England SRSCs (Student Recruitment and Support Centres) and SSTs which featured information about Peer Support and OUSET as well as an overview of the other work carried out by the Association. The team is now exploring rolling out the presentations to ALs and if feasible shared with the Nation Offices too.
- 12.2 The CEC agreed that this was a great initiative and thought they should be continued wherever appropriate.
- 12.3 **ACTION:** The Head of Student Support advised that if the appetite was there, she will arrange for the CEC to visit an SST to listen to student calls being made. She will keep the CEC informed of any opportunities that she can arrange.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL, REPORT AND INFORMATION

13. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CEC 10/18/13

- 13.1 The WELS FAR highlighted an error in her report as she had intended to refer to Sally Hayes, Director of Strategy, and Planning & Resources (WELS).

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14. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GROUPS CEC 10/18/14

15. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES CEC 10/18/15

16. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT CEC 10/18/16

16.1 The FASS FAR raised the issue of the lack of budget for FARs as it appeared that all other CEC members had some monies allocated. It was confirmed that there was no specific budget line for the FARs or AARs but that funds can be available for projects/meetings that members attend but that it is allocated under other specified budget lines, namely the Community budget for AARs and Student Voice for the FARs. The VP roles have small budget lines for incidental expenses that can't be covered elsewhere. It was noted that the new Deputy Chief Executive (Finance & Resources) and VP Administration will be carrying out a review of the budget in the New Year.

17. RECEIVED: WEBSITE USER TESTING PROJECT: USABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY CEC 10/18/17

18. MAGAZINE REDEVELOPMENT CEC 10/18/18

18.1 Many members had comments on this paper and queried the move to a website magazine format over the current PDF format. The Deputy President felt that consultation with students was required before making this change as she felt the PDF version allowed better accessibility and was more easily downloadable and requested some evidence showing students' preferences before making any decision.

18.2 VP Media & Communications and Head of Digital Communications advised that there is a need to make the magazine more mobile friendly to appeal to more users and PDFs are difficult to read and navigate through on mobile devices. The aim would be to also make it easier for students to contribute, allowing a more flexible workspace and keeping each edition to a reasonable length. They explained that a website version would also allow evaluation into how students are engaging with the magazine and measure the articles that are most popular, information that a PDF version cannot provide.

18.3 **ACTION & RESOLUTION:** The CEC agreed that no decision should be made before further research is carried out and then brought back to the CEC for further discussion.

19 VOLUNTEER UPDATES CEC 10/18/19

19.1 The OU Student Council Member highlighted the interesting initiatives in the paper and asked for further explanation on some of the points made. The Deputy President confirmed that the volunteer Slack trial was initiated following the volunteer research project that showed an appetite for a better social space for volunteers to talk to each other. Slack is an online tool that requires a log-in so would be a secure space that the PLEXUS committee already use. 12 students are currently trialling the programme and the link for student volunteers to join will be sent in the next volunteer newsletter.

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- 19.2 The Alumni Mentors role was queried, and the Head of Student Support clarified that it is still in the very early stages with a conversation being had with the Careers and Employability department about how it can be taken forward and exploring what work has been done in the past. The President noted that AOUG may also be interested in getting involved further with this.
- 19.3 Head of Student Support provided further explanation on the Student Research Partners that is intended for students in secure environments being able to nominate a research partner to carry out research on their behalf due to having no access to the internet themselves. The team are exploring the initiative with Ruth McFarlane, Senior Manager Students in Secure Environments.

ITEMS TO NOTE

20. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

- 20.1 None reported.

21. PRESIDENT'S BUSINESS

- 21.1 The President carried out a workshop on OU Students Association Policy. The feedback will be collated and used as a starting point for a further discussion on policy with the CEC and also the Central Committee Reps (CCRs). She will bring a paper back to a future meeting.

22. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 22.1 VP Student Support wanted to discuss the role of the Immediate Past President (IPP) which in the past has had the role of Chair of OUSET for the two-year term immediately following their term as President. This is written into the OUSET Declaration of Trust, the Bye-Laws and is mentioned in the Constitution and was initially established to provide the President with a role to enable the individual to step away from the organisation gradually. The issue had been raised due to the current IPP resigning from all of her Association duties which had highlighted the need to revise the IPP role as it should no longer be assumed that a Past President would be able to commit to a further term of volunteering.
- 22.2 ACTION:** It was agreed that a review on this role is required to give flexibility and further discussion will be held on the CEC forum.

23. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

- 18.1 The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of 25 – 27 January 2018.