OU Students ASSOCIATION

CEC 01/21/M

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
16 January – 26 January 2021

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held via the online forums from 16 January – 26 January 2021 and via Microsoft Teams on 23-24 January 2021.

PRESENT
Patrice Belton - Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Ian Cheyne – Deputy President
Lorena Fontan-Grana - Area Association Representative (AAR) for Wales
Elyse Hocking – Area Association Representative (AAR) for Scotland
Gareth Jones - Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Business & Law (FBL)
Sarah Jones – President (Chair)
Alison Kingan - Vice President Student Support
Marius Kontodras – Area Association Representative (AAR) for Northern Ireland
Katie MacFarlane – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Science, Technology and Maths (STEM)
Matt Porterfield - Vice President Administration
Lucy Richardson – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Open
Verity Saunders – Faculty Association Representative (FAR) for Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)
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
Wendy Burrell – Deputy Chief Executive (Student and Staff Engagement)
Gabriella Cull – Executive Support Assistant (minutes)
Kate Dungate, Head of Digital Communications (part)
Sue Maccabe – Strategy Change and Projects Coordinator (part)
Beth Metcalf – Head of Student Volunteering and Representation (part)
Dan Moloney – Policy and Public Affairs Manager (part)
Suzan Nube – Student Observer
Heather Phillips – Student Observer
Leanne Quainton – Head of Executive Support & Staff Welfare
Verity Robinson – Head of Student Support (part)
Pete Turner, Head of Student Community (Job Share) (part)
Leanne White – Student Observer

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A.   PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed the CEC to the January 2021 meeting, the first one of the year, and gave a special welcome to the three student observers who were in attendance. The President acknowledged that two CEC members had resigned since the last meeting, Michelle Riley (AAR England) and Ray Adcock (AAR Europe).

B.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cinnomen McGuigan - Vice President Education

C.   MINUTES

C.1   The minutes of the last meeting (CEC 10/20/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 16 – 26 January 2021

**1.   RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE CENTRAL EXECUTIVE   CEC 10/20/1
        COMMITTEE**

1.1   The CEC received the reports of the CEC.

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

2.1   Some of the CEC members questioned whether the BAME group should be submitting a report for the CEC's information. Head of Student Support confirmed that there is still no formal committee in place so until this is done, there should be no expectation for a report from the BAME group.

2.2   The FBL FAR asked whether there is a requirement for what the group reports should contain and noted the lack of information and detail in the DSG report. The Head of Student Support explained that the groups do not have a template for submitting CEC reports but following conversations with the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator, there is likely to be a session with their committees to discuss this and create a template for their use. This will create uniformity across the reports.

3.   RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES   CEC 10/20/3

3.1   The FBL FAR was pleased to see an increase in the number of clubs and number of students who registered with them. He did however note the continuing delay in receiving reports from some Societies. The Head of Student Community (Job Share) reported a struggle to ensure that all Societies are up to date with their reporting and stated that both the Student Community and Resources team do have to chase some Societies and make regular contact. Recently, there has been a change to the Societies reporting requirements to make it easier for Societies.

3.2   The Student Member of Council asked what the criteria is for disaffiliating a Society, following the disaffiliation of the Ballet and Opera Society. The Head of Student Community (Job Share) explained that following a period of offering support to the members in the Society and receiving no responses or contact back, the difficult decision was made to disaffiliate them. He outlined that this happens occasionally - where a society is driven by one key student and when that student graduates or has life pressures, there is little momentum to keep the society running, particularly if membership is already low.

4.   RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT   CEC 10/20/4

4.1   The CEC received the regular Finance Report.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION
Taken on the Forum Meeting between 16 – 26 January 2021

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5.   RECEIVED: BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT   CEC 01/21/5

5.1   The CEC received the regular report from the Board of Trustees.

6.   RECEIVED: FRESHERS FORTNIGHT 2021   CEC 01/21/6

6.1   The FBL FAR thanked everyone who was involved with the organisation of Freshers Fortnight and extended special thanks to those who covered events where there were gaps in CEC attendance. The Wales AAR noted that feedback from students was very positive and the sessions were all well attended. The CEC thanked those involved.

7.   RECEIVED: CEC CODE OF CONDUCT   CEC 01/21/7

7.1   The CEC received the previously approved CEC Code of Conduct and associated One Team Guiding Principles, which were created to include new ways of working, reinforcing already agreed practices and to support an inclusive One Team ethos.

8.   RECEIVED: STUDENT VOICE WEEK 2020   CEC 01/21/8

8.1   The FBL FAR extended his thanks to everyone involved in creating and participating in the events that took place during Student Voice week. The Student Member of Council noted that whilst overall there was good participation, the attendance for some

sessions had been minimal. She questioned how the Association can encourage increased engagement and better promote these particular sessions. VP Engagement commented that our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students consultation highlights the struggle to engage those students across all of the Association's platforms. She did however explain that despite low attendance, rich and insightful feedback was received and is currently being explored by the Strategy and Research team. Once the feedback has been explored, actions will be put together in order to increase engagement next time.

9.	**RECEIVED: WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE**	**CEC 01/21/9**

9.1   This paper shared an update on the progress with this project and included as an appendix the request for proposals document that has been sent out to prospective providers. VP Student Support highlighted that this document mentions 1000 visitors to the website in the fortnight during freshers, despite her assumption that there were more visitors to the website than that and asked for further clarification on this figure. The Head of Digital Communications responded to confirm that 1000 was the total number of visitors at the peak of Freshers. VP Student Support welcomed the mention of peer group supporters but asked for assurances that the identities of the supporters are not connected to their Peer Supporter IDs. Head of Digital Communications answered that the wishlist document for the new website mentions the anonymity of peer supporters and a few providers have queried this, illustrating that the message is getting through.

10.	**RECEIVED: RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT**	**CEC 01/21/10**

10.1   In regard to student representatives on interview panels, VP Student Support asked what posts these will be for and whether the CEC could have a say on this. She also stated a need for training to be offered to those on the panels who need it, as some student representatives have said they would benefit from training before sitting on a panel. The Chief Executive explained he is unable to be more specific about what roles will or will not be covered as of yet, as the OU's senior recruitment for Executive roles is enshrined and dictated by the Charter of Statutes. This is awaiting the long-delayed review of the OU's Charter and Statutes which is due to be picked back up at some stage in the future. He outlined that PVC Students is very supportive of students being on Executive recruitment panels as standard and her commitment to this idea is shown through her agreement in putting this into this Agreement, so that Council is made aware and will give support for this change to be made when the review does eventually take place. With regards to training, the Chief Executive confirmed that he and the President have raised this with the Head of Governance and with the OU's People Services and they anticipate a meeting being arranged soon to discuss this further.

10.2   The Relationship Agreement was noted and endorsed by the CEC for approval by the Board of Trustees at their next meeting in February 2021.

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION
Taken on 23 January via Microsoft Teams

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11.   STRATEGY PERFORMANCE REPORT   **CEC 01/21/11**

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. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator welcomed any comments or questions from the CEC.

11.2   The Student Member of Council thanked the Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator for the report and welcomed the progress on the KPIs, Strategic Projects and Business Plans. She was however disappointed with the low response rate to the annual membership survey (metric 1). Whilst she questioned what could be done to improve responses, she also outlined that there has been a lot of discontent on social media, with students commenting that the Association only approaches students when there is a survey which needs completing. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator agreed that the 0.80% response rate was disappointing and highlighted that the soft-launch likewise had a low response rate. She did confirm though that it was not the same 1% of students responding to the surveys. Furthermore, the low response rates could also be due to a technical issue due to using Microsoft Forms surveys and students being required to have a Microsoft 365 account to fill out the survey. The OU recently reported that only less than half of students have this account so whilst the survey may be sent out to a large number of students, only half of them may have the option to complete the survey from the outset. This issue will be explored further by the Strategy and Research team.

11.3   VP Engagement outlined that the Association has to follow OU guidance and processes regarding sending emails to students and this could explain why some students believe they are only reached out to when a survey needs completing. The OU restricts the number of emails that can be sent to students to prevent them from being bombarded. She further recognised that the Association does need to try connecting with students to prevent this discontent in the future.

11.4   VP Community was pleased to see that 20J Freshers had helped the increase in visitors to the website and overall engagement with the Association. In regard to the newsletter, she outlined how the click-through rate is really low, despite a third of students opening the email, illustrating students' disinterest. The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator will be looking at the OU's rate of click-through in order to give some intelligence and comparison to our figures.

11.5   The Deputy President asked what effect the current Covid-19 situation has had on the improvements and deteriorations of some of the statistical figures. It was confirmed that due to having no non-Covid benchmark, it was unknown as to how much the Covid situation has affected these statistics. There is a need for more data over a longer period of time to be able to understand if Covid has caused trends.

11.6 The Strategic Projects and Change Coordinator asked the CEC to endorse the proposal from the project team working on Strategic Project 9, to pause work on elements of this project in order to focus on new priorities.

11.7 **RESOLUTION:** The CEC endorsed pausing this project pending a re-scoping exercise. This proposal will now be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval.

11.8 The FBL FAR raised a question regarding capacity issues. At the October CEC, issues of capacity arose with concerns around how CEC will be able to contribute to these projects whilst still being able to manage all of their other commitments. He further recognised that capacity issues are still a concern and even more so currently, due to the pressures of lockdown and home-schooling. He questioned whether projects 4, 5 and 6 were still going ahead as planned next month. It was confirmed that Trustees had been made aware of the capacity issues for both student representatives and staff. However it was still the intention that these projects were planned to go ahead as scheduled, and expressions of interest will be circulated shortly.

12. ATHABASCA RELATIONSHIP   CEC 01/21/12

12.1 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager put forward this paper to CEC in order to provide context and justification for the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which has been developed through discussions with student leaders and staff from Athabasca University Students' Union and Athabasca University Graduate Students' Union. He asked the CEC to approve the terms of the MoU in relation to entering a partnership with this other institution.

12.2 The Memorandum of Understanding was agreed to be mutually beneficial for both parties involved to establish a partnership agreement in writing, to set out how they will work together moving forward and also to understand what the purpose of the partnership is. The MoU will enable the Association to move forward towards the next discussions about a more formal distance learning network with a shared understanding of what the parties are hoping to achieve and how.

12.3 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager outlined the key points in the MoU, acknowledging that it will be led and directed by elected student leaders and supported by staff where required. Secondly, the designated leads for each partner organisation will be accountable to their own organisation's governance structure. Thirdly, the MoU focused on the idea of bringing together organisations with a shared interest and an intention to explore how a formal international network might work in practice. The agreement will also be reviewed every six months. Finally, the MoU would not be legally binding and had no fixed term length, meaning that the Association could choose to withdraw from it at any time.

12.4 The FBL FAR asked who will be undertaking the six month review of the MoU. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager outlined that this was yet to be confirmed with the student leads but CEC involvement would be necessary and beneficial.

12.5 VP Engagement questioned whether an update paper will come to each CEC meeting, to which the Policy and Public Affairs Manager confirmed that CEC will receive a

regular update on the MoU and partnership with the Athabasca University Students' Union and Athabasca University Graduate Students' Union.

12.6 **RESOLUTION**: CEC approved the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding. This would now be presented to the Board of Trustees for final approval at their meeting in February 2021. A mirroring process was underway at Athabasca.

12.7 The Student Member of Council asked whether the Association is planning on working with other distance-learning institutions and what the scope of this network is. The Chief Executive explained that there is a desire from all of the current partners to get other distance-learning institutions involved and create more partnerships in the future, however it was Athabasca who had approached the Association first and this offered us the opportunity to pilot this approach and build a network together with a willing partner. He explained that Athabasca are very similar to the Open University Students' Association as they have around 40,000 distance-learning students and face very similar challenges to us. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager had conducted research last year on other international distance-learning institutions that would be potential partners for the Association to work with, so there is scope for very exciting developments in the future. He emphasised that it will be good to share practice and learn from other examples elsewhere as well as sharing our own good practice.

12.8 The Student Member of Council raised that Spain have the UNED which is a distance learning institution and she was very happy to help with any language barriers and translation if this was an institution to be explored in the future. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager gratefully accepted this offer and confirmed that they were on the list of potential partners. Language barriers could potentially be an issue with some and this was another reason why the opportunity with Athabasca felt like a good initial partner. It was hoped that we could find ways to work around this and so any offers of help were welcome.

13. OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION SCOTLAND MANIFESTO POLICY POSITIONS CEC 10/20/13

13.1 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager and AAR Scotland presented this paper to obtain agreement over the policies that will be included in an OU Students Association Scottish Election manifesto for the devolved elections currently scheduled for May 2021. The CEC were asked to approve the policy positions that will be included in the OU Students Association Scottish manifesto.

13.2 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager outlined that a manifesto is needed as students in Scotland are directly impacted by the actions and decisions made by the Scottish government and subsequently, it is necessary for the OU Students Association to attempt to influence the parties and politicians taking part in the elections. Following discussions with AAR Scotland, five policy positions had been selected, similar to the Wales manifesto which was previously presented and agreed by CEC. The first suggested policy position was to reform the disabled student finance application process. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager explained that disabled students in Scotland face many difficulties when applying for and receiving the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) due to having to provide evidence on an annual basis, even for permanent and long-term conditions, and in general, having a slow and long-winded

application process. VP Student Support was in favour of this policy position as she also recognised the problematic system for applying for DSA. She explained that to be entitled to the DSA in Scotland, students have to be studying 60 credits (whereas they only have to be studying 30 credits in England). This is difficult for disabled students to achieve, as due to their disability they can often only study 30 credits comfortably. She suggested that this should be recognised as part of this policy position. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager assured VP Student Support that this would be looked into further.

13.3   The other policy positions suggested for approval were to extend maintenance loan availability to part-time students as although OU students in Scotland benefit from the part-time fee grant (PTFG), maintenance loans are not currently available to part-time students in Scotland. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager then outlined the need to extend the availability of support for parents from the Childcare fund to part-time students. Part-time students are unfairly excluded from being able to access the Childcare Fund in Scotland, which ultimately provides a disincentive for parents in Scotland. Further to this, a lack of decent broadband is a major barrier to accessing part-time and distance-learning education in Scotland, particularly in rural and lower-income areas. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager suggested that the Scottish economy would benefit from an investment in ensuring everyone has access to broadband internet and would also help prevent social exclusion simultaneously. Therefore, there is a need to address digital exclusion in rural and socially deprived areas and this would be the fourth policy position.

13.4   The final policy position was to carry out a wide-ranging review into the barriers to higher education, experienced by individuals with protected characteristics. Further to the recent commitments made by the OU Students Association in its statement regarding Black Lives Matter, this policy seeks to provide a national understanding of systematic barriers to access and participation.

13.5   VP Engagement was pleased to see the Association creating a manifesto to influence Scottish policy before the election. She questioned whether a similar manifesto will be created for Northern Ireland, the EU and England. The Policy and Public Affairs Manager explained that the Northern Ireland elections were scheduled for 2022 and therefore the Association would align work with these timings and that a manifesto for England will be created once Westminster elections commence or in the event of a snap election.

13.6   RESOLUTION: The CEC approved the policy positions for the Scotland Manifesto.

14.   SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY   CEC 01/21/14

14.1   VP Engagement and the Deputy Chief Executive (Staff and Student Engagement) presented this paper explaining that due to social media spaces becoming increasingly more popular and constantly evolving, the Association's social media guidelines were outdated and had not been re-evaluated since they were established in 2015. Student engagement is becoming more prominent via social media channels and there is now a need for better guidelines and improved rules in order to create a safe and welcoming place and an inclusive culture. They explained that the University had recently updated its social media policy to strengthen its ability to challenge

negative conduct in OU associated spaces and this proposed policy will enable the Association to do the same.

14.2 The Open FAR disagreed with section 13 and stated that the rules around region and Nation Association Facebook groups did not belong in this document and should be put in a different policy. The Deputy Chief Executive (Staff and Student Engagement) illustrated the immediate need for these rules to be put in place, so individuals can be held accountable for their actions. VP Engagement supported this, outlining that it is useful to set out how volunteers engage in social media spaces. The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation explained that some of these rules could be put into the volunteer policy therefore this proposal will be looked into further.

14.3 The Policy and Public Affairs Manager expressed the importance of Area Association Representatives being admins of the Nation and region/area Facebook groups. The Area Association Representatives have huge frustrations in that they can't show students what they have been doing and therefore it was necessary for them to be admins of the Facebook groups to give the representatives the platform that they need. Issues surrounding previous volunteers and students still being admins of some groups were discussed and flagged as also needing to be changed.

14.4 The FASS FAR explained that she has recently set up a Facebook page under her new role of FASS FAR and questioned whether permission was needed to do so. VP Engagement responded that permission wasn't needed but that the Association will keep a log of people's Facebook groups and twitter accounts. However, they will need to be deleted when individuals leave their roles. One observer asked about how the investigation process will work following a social media policy breach. The Deputy Chief Executive (Staff and Student Engagement) explained that if someone behaves inappropriately, the Association can investigate against our own social media policy and take them aside to address their behaviour. If bad behaviour continues, the Association can take it further through the disciplinary procedure.

14.5 The Wales AAR expressed her support of this policy and the need for student volunteers to feel protected, especially as a lot of student representatives' work is on social media. She explained that having guidelines is crucial, particularly for newer representatives.

14.6 Following an in-depth conversation, the President recognised that the policy document needed more refinement before it was approved.

14.7 **RESOLUTION & ACTION:** The CEC approved the policy on the condition that it will be refined further with comments taken on board. The revised policy will be shared via Microsoft Teams for further comments and then posted on the forum for final approval.

15. APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE   CEC 10/20/15

15.1 VP Administration and the Head of Student Volunteering and Representation introduced the paper which asked for approval for proposed changes to the Bye-laws in relation to the Association's Appointments Committee. The Appointments Committee is a sub-committee of the Board of Trustees. VP Administration explained that many operational aspects had been removed from the Bye-Laws and put into a

separate terms of reference to allow for an annual review and making it easier to update aspects when required.

15.2   VP Engagement questioned whether the Board of Trustees (BoT) report will now include Appointments Committee updates. The Chief Executive confirmed that the BoT report currently does not cover the full workings of the sub-committees, however if there was something of particular interest or a paper/report had been presented to the main Board, it would be included as it would have been part of the Board's business and as the intention is for the BoT to now receive a regular report from the Appointments Committee, their business will be picked up in the BoT report.

15.3   VP Engagement asked whether forum discussions of the Appointments Committee would be minuted. The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation said all discussions will be summarised and the Appointments Committee would have the opportunity to agree on the summarised text before it goes into the Trustees report. Furthermore, VP Engagement commented on section 13.7 which stated that a CCR may be removed by the BoT, on recommendation of the Appointments Committee if they have failed to attend two or more meetings within one committee year and if their conduct has been investigated and deemed unacceptable. She stated that there currently wasn't a way to let staff know of issues with attendance. The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation confirmed that staff can see if CCRs do not attend meetings through the reports received.

15.4   **ACTION:** The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation will go back and look into the wording for section 13 around attendance and apologies to the meetings.

15.5   **RESOLUTION:** CEC approved the changes to the Bye-laws in relation to the Association's Appointments Committee.

16.   ELECTIONS REVIEW   CEC 01/21/16

16.1   VP Administration and the Head of Student Volunteering and Representation introduced this paper. They highlighted that the Association faces many challenges when it comes to elections and are continuously met with low voter turnout and vacant or uncontested elections for various positions. An Election Review Working Group had been set up to begin the election review early to allow time to implement changes before the 2022 elections commence. Following research into existing data and feedback, VP Administration and the Head of Student Volunteering and Representation brought the group's suggestions to CEC for feedback and discussion.

16.2   The areas for discussion were; improving voter turnout, decreasing uncontested or vacant positions and encouraging new students to stand for election, supporting the student population to understand what roles entail, culture and use of forums/videos, staff time spent on elections, Trustees/CEC elections and governance. VP Administration also welcomed alternative suggestions for areas to discuss and improve on.

16.3   One of the observers suggested that an extra role could be created to help with the extra roles which staff are currently fulfilling, as stated in 2.5.2 regarding the Returning Officer. She also commented that the Trustee and CEC elections should be split so

that the work demanded from the election process would not be as overwhelming as it is when all elections happen at once. VP Admin mentioned that continuing to use staff was not ideal as it takes away time from them which could be spent on other projects. However, bringing in an external person to fulfil the Returning Officer role would be expensive and cause a funding issue.

16.4   Lack of understanding amongst students surrounding the whole process from application to coming into role was clear. One observer stated that following attendance at a Fresher's session on the application process, she was made aware that applicants were often unsure of what is involved in each role and what being on the CEC entails. She suggested that the Fresher's application process session would be better as a Q&A session with previous role holders, so potential applicants could gain a greater understanding into the demands of each role. The STEM FAR agreed with this lack of clarity, stating that role descriptions need to be made clearer as currently they could be open to interpretation. The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation emphasised the need to better support candidates before they stand for their role. Introducing a fact checker during the process could further support candidates and make sure they are aware of what the role is.

16.5   VP Engagement responded to 2.4.2 outlining that the forums were no longer fit for purpose as it continues to be the same few students engaging in the space each time. She suggested that live hustings would be a better alternative and would take up less resources as staff moderators would not be necessary in the same manner as at present.

16.6   The Student Member of Council acknowledged the large drop out of candidates at the stage of submitting videos, as seen in 2.4.1. She questioned whether the Association was being less inclusive by asking for a video as not everyone can use the technology or is comfortable with it, or in some cases even have it. She anticipated that if we were to change to the live hustings over video submissions, there would be greater engagement and more students putting themselves forward for a position.

16.7   **ACTION:** The Head of Student Volunteering and Representation will start a thread on Microsoft Teams to enable further discussions and suggestions to support the elections review.

17.   EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI) WORKING GROUP UPDATE CEC 10/20/15

17.1   The Head of Student Support and VP EDI brought this paper to CEC to provide updates on the Working Group's progress and to also approve the group's request to form a committee. Due to the group gaining extra responsibilities, they suggested that an EDI Committee is a more appropriate group to oversee the delivery of strategy project 14 (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan).

17.2   VP EDI gave context to the working group, outlining that the group was set up in early Autumn to work through the pledges made in the Association's Black Lives Matter statement. They created an action plan which was designed to be a working document that could be added to as the group begin new projects. Currently, the action plan is heavily centred around race but VP EDI confirmed that as the group pick up new

projects and membership expands, the group expect other projects surrounding different protected characteristics.

17.3   The WELS FAR expressed concern around the big focus on race and little concentration on other characteristics such as disabled or LGBTQ students. She questioned whether there was capacity to have separate working groups for these other characteristics. VP EDI explained that the group had a mandate to fulfil following the Black Lives Matter statement but have come to the conclusion that a committee is needed as it will be able to encompass broader representation of other inclusion groups. She suggested that a broader committee means there is capacity for some members to be working on projects concerning race and others working on projects surrounding different protected characteristics.

17.4   VP Engagement expressed support of the group becoming a committee and suggested that expressions of interest to be on the committee should be put out. VP EDI explained that to be on the committee, members must have a working knowledge and experience of EDI. The Student Member of Council supported this, advising caution against the committee being 'too CEC heavy'. She recommended VP Education, VP Engagement and VP EDI to be the resident CEC members and then 3-4 other students who come from backgrounds surrounding EDI issues, potentially looking at students who are part of the DSG, BAME and OU Pride groups. VP Community reinforced this idea acknowledging that a big committee can be a hindrance and so a small and targeted group would function better. She did however propose that it could be worthwhile having some student reference panels who can be consulted on when further advice is needed on a particular issue.

17.5   The Open FAR recognised the importance of awareness and support for trans-volunteers as she had witnessed them being treated badly. Subsequently, she argued for this to be considered as one of the protected characteristics and more work to be done surrounding this group. Head of Student Volunteering and Representation is looking to organise an EDI conference for volunteers, and one part of the training will be on trans awareness as she is also aware of some issues from particular volunteers.

17.6   ACTION: CEC approved the request to change the EDI working group to a committee.

SECTION D: ITEMS TO NOTE

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18.   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

18.1   Partnership with University of Bologna:

The FBL FAR updated the CEC on the partnership with the University of Bologna which was due to commence last October, however.due to the impact of Brexit and other issues, it had been rescheduled for this coming October. He informed CEC that discussions will be needed around how best to support these students and how they will access Association resources. Discussions will continue on the forum/Microsoft Teams with next steps being looked at before the April CEC.

18.2   <u>Academic References</u>:

The FBL FAR then highlighted this issue which is a particular problem in the Faculty of Business and Law. He explained that the standard referencing system has proved insufficient, and more bespoke academic references are needed for students wanting to study elsewhere. The main issue stated was that tutors are not obligated in their contracts to provide a reference and therefore students are getting the bare minimum in terms of their references. This is a cause of concern as it has prevented a law student from being accepted on a law course at the University of Cambridge. The President acknowledged this long-standing issue and explained that she and VP Education have it on their agenda to take to the Academic Implementation Group (AIG).

ACTION: President and VP Education to take this issue as an agenda item to the next AIG meeting.

ACTION: FBL FAR to start a thread in the forums/Teams for further discussion.

18.3   <u>Student Consultations</u>:

VP Engagement raised awareness around the student consultations, outlining that there were 10 online consultations planned of which they are hoping to send 3 people to each one (either staff or CEC members). There will be a poll up next week to see everyone's availability. More discussions around the consultations to be had via Teams.

19.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

19.1   The next meeting of the Central Executive Committee will take place over the weekend of the 16 – 18 April 2021.