CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (C E C) 3 – 5 July 2015

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (C E C) held between
3 – 5 July 2015 at Kent’s Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT

Ruth Tudor - President
Nik Morris - Deputy President
David Humble - V P Administration
Lorraine Adams - V P Communications
Josh Brumpton - V P Education Policy
Peter Cowan - V P Educational Support & Research
Sue Goodyear - V P Representation
Alison Kingan - V P Student Support

Carey Shaw – OU Council Member
Claire Lannigan – South & South West
Claire Smith - Wales
Mark Cameron – Scotland
Christian Klein – Northern Europe

IN ATTENDANCE:
Anca Seaton – West Midlands Observer
Dave Milliken – Northern Ireland Observer
Hyacinth Richards – London Observer

Rob Avann - General Manager
Wendy Burrell – Head of Engagement & Support
Magda Zamojska – Head of Operations
Leanne Quainton – Executive Assistant
Pooja Sinha – Research & Information Officer

SECTION A: INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

The President welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as giving a special welcome
to the Observers in attendance from the regions and nations. Pooja Sinha, the
Research and Information Officer covering maternity was also in attendance for part of
the meeting. The President acknowledged that Lucy Beech, S A R London and the
South East and Wendy White, S A R Yorkshire and the North had both stood down
from their roles with OUSA and she wished them well for the future.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Nicci Simpson – Northern Ireland
Michail Kasoutas - Southern Europe
3. MINUTES

3.1 The Minutes (C E C 3/15/M) from the March meeting were approved.

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

4.1 None recorded.

SECTION B: ITEMS FOR APPROVAL AND REPORT

5. RECEIVED: STATE OF UNITS AND SOCIETIES  

6. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES (S A Rs) FOR REGIONS AND NATIONS

7. RECEIVED: OFFICER & COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS

8. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

9. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

9.1 The General Manager went through the report adding that following the recruitment process for the Deputy General Manager position, Wendy Burrell, the current Head of Engagement and Support had been successfully appointed and will start in her new role from 3 August 2015.

10. PROPOSED OUSA BUDGET 2015/16

10.1 V P Administration introduced the draft OUSA Budget for 2015/16 that will be going to the Board of Trustees for approval at their next meeting on 6 July. He explained that the budget currently indicates a deficit of £130k next year however £90k of this is will come from the designated reserves for Conference 2016. There have been increases made to Societies, increasing their grants and additional funds towards a societies drive as well as an increase to Officer expenses to better reflect the reality of their increased level of activity and having to travel to Milton Keynes more often to attend meetings. There will be a further change to this budget, once the final underspend from 2014/15 is known an adjustment will need to be made to our expenditure to reduce our reserves.
11. **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO OU-OUSA RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT**

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

12. **PROPOSAL FOR A PILOT STUDY FOR THE DELIVERY METHODS RESEARCH**

12.1 There has been concern from students for some time about the perceived move from printed materials to increased online/onscreen delivery. V P Educational Support and Research brought forward a proposal to carry out a pilot study, to a sample size of approx. 800 students, to gain and better understand students’ views on blended learning to inform us of the perceptions held by students. Results will then be used to inform a future further stage to collect an evidence base to use when approaching the OU.

12.2 The pilot survey is intended to analyse student perceptions of how module delivery may affect students learning experience along with the limitations and benefits of both print and online/onscreen. The definition of online delivery has deliberately been left blurred for students to advise us of their perception without leading them although a view from the Executive warned that this approach may result in confused answers.

12.3 **RESOLUTION:** With some minor changes to wording and condensing of questions, the pilot study was approved.

13. **OU STUDENTS SHOP**

13.1 Head of Operations, Magda Zamojska gave a presentation on the new-look OU Students Shop (previously referred to as O S L – OUSA Services Ltd). Magda ran through the background of the project that evidenced the need for improvement to the old webshop as it was no longer fit for purpose for both staff maintaining it and students purchasing from it.

13.2 Gravit-e Centric was selected as the preferred service provider following extensive market research and consideration of competitive quotes. The company could meet all of the service requirements needed which included multiple display options, a new vibrant appearance, stock control, digital downloads and invoicing systems as well as ongoing support.

13.3 Images of the new OU Students Shop was shown to the C E C and it is anticipated to go live at the end of July 2015, subject to appropriate support from the OU’s IT department.

14. **QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (Q A A) REVIEW 2015**

14.1 V P Education Policy updated on the work undertaken by the Project Group since the last meeting, focussing on the first draft of the student submission which was put to the C E C for comment.
14.2 Members discussed the paper in detail and recommended amendments that V P Education Policy will take away and incorporate.

14.3 The final submission will be submitted in September 2015 before the Q A A visit in December 2015.

15. **LOCATIONS ANALYSIS PROJECT**

15.1 Jim Miller attended the meeting to provide an update on the Locations Analysis project. He explained that the brief for the project was to consider the role of Regional and National offices and how it was essential that whatever their appearance and role looked like in the future that it should link to the University's strategic ambitions to provide an outstanding experience to students.

15.2 Key discussions were around the understanding that there is no longer a compelling rationale for the current system; that the geographical link to Student Support teams has been lost; that there is limited evidence of a positive link between the OU's business and current OU locations and that a broader strategic direction is now necessary. Emerging themes in the project centred around the management of any future change and how best to retain staff and maintain expertise and experience.

15.3 Propositions have included retaining the status quo, a reconfiguration of the current position to retain the Campus and offices in capital cities (centralisation option); a decentralisation option with functions currently accessed from Milton Keynes being spread throughout the UK or more regional options, however different to the current arrangements.

15.4 An appraisal of the options is underway and being reviewed against strategic ambitions and current projects.

15.5 Next steps for the project team are to produce recommendations with a timetable for implementation, followed by further meetings for feedback and findings ready for governance meetings in the autumn.

15.6 There followed a question and answer session where questions included issues about the impact on students and Student Support teams, issues for disabled students, preserving local knowledge and understanding local sensitivities, issues for students in Europe and the lessons learnt from the closure of East Grinstead. Students also raised questions about how change would affect the Student Consultative structure and Jim agreed to include this issue in future discussions.

16. **STUDENT CONSULTATIVE PROCESS**

16.1 The review of the process, carried out by S U M S Consulting is now complete and a presentation of the outcomes and recommendations was delivered to the Student Consultative Executive in April. A lot of the recommendations made were well received by OUSA reps as they clearly identified many issues OUSA had highlighted. An implementation group has been set up to consider whether and how best to implement these recommendations into the process.
16.2 The surgeries part of the regional English consultative meetings continues to face some opposition from the OU following the addition of it this year as a way for students being able to talk to an S S T about individual issues/questions prior to the meeting, preventing these conversations from dominating the meeting itself. Comments from the C E C were in agreement that it appeared that this part of the meeting had not been properly promoted and the purpose of the surgeries was unclear for both students and the OU staff who were meant to be running them. A better structure and more information about what the sessions entail is needed for them to work more effectively.

16.3 The General Manager asked the C E C to look at the proposed schedule of dates for 2016 that have been moved earlier in the year, starting in February through to April. Eventbrite will be used for students to book their a place at the meetings which caused concern with some C E C members although to move to an online, automatic system will assist extensively with staff workload.

16.4 The Executive agreed that meetings were still not long enough to fully engage in the discussions. Closing the feedback loop from these meetings was something that came out of the review that the C E C agreed still needs improving with a mechanism brought in detailing the reasons whether comments from consultations were taken on board or not. It would also be helpful for regions to see other regions summary reports and it was thought these reports should be available to all for a longer period of time.

16.5 **ACTION: The General Manager and the members of the Student Consultative Executive to continue to push for improvements to these meetings especially around keeping the inclusion of the surgeries.**

16.6 Discussions were held over filling the student places on the student consultative structures for 2015-16 and it was agreed:

- University Students Consultative Forum – Nation S A Rs to discuss with their Assembly/Assembly Executives and to appoint a volunteer from each. V P Representation and S A R South and South-West to discuss for the one English place. European S A Rs to do the same for the 2 international student places. The centrally appointed volunteers will be decided following the Central Reps Seminar at the end of July. **ACTION: The Deputy President and V P Representation to put together a description of what this role entails to assist the S A Rs when speaking to their Assemblies.**

- University Students Consultative Executive – The Deputy President to continue. The 3 members from the Students Consultative Forum will be decided following the Central Reps Seminar.

- Student Support Team Consultative Forums. All C E C members will automatically be allocated to their appropriate S S T. The General Manger will then see where there are gaps.

- Open Degree Consultative Forum – V P Education Policy and S A R Scotland volunteered from the C E C subject to being approved as the Open Degree Programme Committee rep who gets an ex-officio place.

- The remaining places will be offered to those members not in attendance at the meeting or following the Central Reps Seminar.
17. APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE - PROPOSAL TO DELEGATE AUTHORITY FOR APPROVAL

17.1 The current process of appointing Central Reps can be a timely procedure with any student applications received needing approval from the Appointments Committee (made up of CEC and BoT representatives and existing Central Reps) and then the names are considered by the CEC and BoT for further approval/concerns to be raised. This can result in a lengthy process and comments are very rarely received back from either the CEC or BoT. Work has already been done into making the Central Reps appointment processes more robust, with a role description, person specification, improved application form and an enhanced annual Central Reps Seminar held to meet potential candidates before they are appointed as well as thorough steps now in place to enable the Appointments Committee to remove individuals should they not be performing correctly. Taking this into account the President asked the CEC to comment on the proposal to delegate overall powers of authority to the Appointments Committee, speeding up the procedure and removing unnecessary barriers.

17.2 There was general agreement for the proposal for delegation to give overall powers to the Appointments Committee although there was some apprehension. The proposal would be put to the BoT on 6 July for approval.

18. OUSA STRATEGY

18.1 The General Manager presented the draft OUSA strategy put together following discussions captured at previous CEC meetings and with the staff team. The Officer Team had also considered a draft at their meeting in May.

18.2 CEC members were asked to comment on the proposed strategy before it was shared with the BoT for approval at their next meeting on 6 July. A detailed discussion was had around the draft and views and comments were raised for consideration.

18.3 RESOLUTION: The CEC recommended that with the changes discussed that the Strategy be approved by the BoT.

19. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE STUDENT CHARTER

19.1 This discussion was of a confidential nature and has therefore been reserved to the confidential section of the minutes

20. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

20.1 V P Communications presented the final strategy following comments made to the draft version at the previous CEC Meeting. The Communications Strategy has now been enhanced and finalised to include an Action Plan, Communications Calendar, the Communications Form and already approved Brand Guidelines. The strategy is an internal document that should be read and applied by all OUSA staff and volunteers who communicate with students to provide clear, consistent communications.
20.2 RESOLUTION: With some minor amendments, the Communications Strategy was approved.

21. UPDATE ON THE OU STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECT CEC7/15/17

21.1 The OU’s Student Engagement Project is a key project currently underway which looks at how students are involved in key decisions in the OU regarding policy and consultations etc. The President, V P Representation and V P Educational Support and Research are on the project Team and have been working on a high level definition of student engagement and carrying out a gap analysis on student engagement across the University. The team are currently planning an event to be held in November where key speakers from other universities innovative in student engagement will be invited to present on how they engage so that the OU can look at how these ideas/procedures can translate to fit our model.

21.2 Action: Head of Engagement and Support to see whether the gap analysis can be shared.

22. ONLINE STUDENT EXPERIENCE PROJECT (O S E P) CEC7/15/18

22.1 Due to time constraints, the video on the O S E P Project could not be shown during the weekend however the O S E P Project Team had created a forum for C E C members’ feedback on the project so it was posted there for viewing after the meeting.

23. VICE-CHANCELLOR PETER HORROCKS CEC7/15/19

23.1 The Vice Chancellor, Peter Horrocks, spoke to the meeting with the emphasis on the needs of OU students in the changing landscape. He introduced the idea of a ‘Students First’ approach that he would be encouraging University wide. He spoke about teaching excellence and the importance of research and getting the balance right between these important aspects of the University's remit. He referred to the strategic objective to provide an outstanding experience for students and importantly ensuring that they received value for their money as well as for all the time and effort put into their studies.

23.2 He talked about his new proposal to address the problem of balancing the academic and non-academic voices. He stressed the importance of student consultation and taking the student voice on board. He shared his idea of the phantom student in the room being party to all decisions made as a way to ensure robust decision making and transparency in everything the University does.

23.3 He expressed a determination to ensure that the university continued to run a cost-effective operation, continued to promote innovation and had the ability to respond quickly to Higher Education sector changes whilst ensuring that students received a top quality education.

23.4 The presentation was followed by a number of questions to the VC including, improving communications to students, ensuring that students' views are considered, closing the feedback loop, postgrad fees and loans, and having student places on future appointment panels.
24. **STUDENT COMMUNITY TOOL**

24.1 Head of Engagement and Support gave the background to the project that was implemented in response to a request made by the President at Council in 2014 for the OU’s support in implementing a new social media tool that was fit for purpose and capable of supporting a vibrant student community that the current platform, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) does not do.

24.2 The Working Group consisting of reps from Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS) and IT, the Deputy President and S A R Northern Ireland as well as staff from the office have been meeting regularly to look at the requirements needed from a social platform to create a better online community for OU students.

24.3 Yammer has been recommended as the solution that delivers abilities that the VLE and other platforms of its kind cannot do. A proposal will go to the OU’s IT Change Board on 6 July for approval.

24.4 OUSA have asked for an initial test period to trial the product to ensure it meets the requirements before being rolled out across the University. If approved at the IT Change Board, a Project Manager from IT will be assigned to the project that will work with OUSA on creating how that trial period will work. It was noted that Yammer will be integrated with Office 365 therefore timescales will be dependent on when the package is rolled out across the university, likely early 2016.

24.5 An issue with Yammer was raised as it works on the .ac.uk email address that not all students’ sign up for which will have to be closely investigated. It was also thought that the my.open.ac.uk would not work at all with Yammer.

24.6 The CEC welcomed the proposals but hoped the solution was not too late and students have been lost with the inadequacies of the VLE. Head of Engagement and Support acknowledged this but highlighted that there is always a want for students to talk and meet.

24.7 **ACTION:** Following the decision at the IT Change Board, further discussions will be had as we explore the potential of this tool to meet the desired purpose.

25. **CONSIDERATION OF PAYMENT FOR OFFICERS**

25.1 This discussion was of a confidential nature and has therefore been reserved to the confidential section of the minutes

26. **GENERAL MANAGER’S BUSINESS**

26.1 None recorded.

27. **PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS**
27.1 The President advised that an additional C E C Meeting and 2 Officer Team Meetings may be needed next year to address some of the big issues that will be going to Conference.

- 23 – 24 January – Possible C E C weekend (likely to be reduced, just the Saturday/Sunday)
- 13-14 February – Possible O T Meeting
- 14-15 May – Possible O T Meeting combined with Conference Steering Committee.

Dates will be posted into the Forum for confirmation.

28. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

28.1 It was confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be the weekend of the 13 – 15 November 2015.