OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
22 – 24 January 2016

ELECTION PROCESSES

The C E C is asked to:-

1) **discuss** the suggested arrangements

2) **authorise** Vice President Administration to draft changes to the Bye-Laws as appropriate

3) **recommend** any further improvements to the Returning Officer

1. Previously regarding elections: over the past five or six years the Association has moved steadily away from the previously restricted set of rules regarding electioneering in an attempt to both open the process to a wider set of candidates and widen the debate during the election period. It would be fair to say we have been far more successful in the latter aim if anything the choice of potential post holders has narrowed.

2. In an attempt to further liberalise the election rules and increase involvement the CEC asked a working team comprising the General Manager in his capacity of Returning Officer, the Deputy President, VP Representation, SAR Northern Ireland and myself to consider the present arrangement, especially in the light of One Member One Vote.

3. I am happy to say that the team agreed about almost everything (apart from the specific form of using the Single Transferrable Vote in a multi member election). In particular all the members were enthusiastic regarding the need to remove restrictions on debate including the ability of candidates and candidates to talk directly to their electorate. To that end we are proposing the removal of the present restrictions on sites where candidates can discuss issues. Thus we propose that candidate and other members will able to discuss the elections on social media such as Facebook and indeed provide links to personal websites.

4. At the same time the OU Students Association should be enabling candidates and voters to make contact in a more structured environment rather than disconnected and hard to find forums. The Electoral Reform Society (ERS) are
to provide an election hub, hopefully designed to be attractive, easy to access and convenient to navigate. We will also be looking to possibilities when it comes to providing technical support to candidates.

5. Another barrier to engagement has concerned the sheer volume of information regarding individual posts. Job descriptions, although valuable to the more dedicated amongst us (and new Officers) can be a complete turn-off for newbies. So short, pithy summations of the various posts will be provided for easy reference. These will be supplemented by pieces provided by present post-holders telling potential candidates what they have enjoyed about the roles concerned.

6. We also need to do a better job of “selling” the idea of holding office. Apart from the satisfaction and enjoyment aspects we have to explain the potential benefits in terms of personal development and CV building.

7. Having removed the requirement for nominations when it comes to SARs we propose to follow the same principle regarding Faculty Representatives. Nevertheless, after a deal of consideration, we did not consider it appropriate for Officers, the Student Member of Council or Trustees to be solely self-nominating. Instead we propose the present system of allowing potential candidates to announce their candidacy and request nominations be expanded. At present requests can be made in specific forums within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) – that should be extended to any platform favoured by the candidate concerned.

8. Since we are moving to One Member One Vote the voting period will have to be extended and moved to occur prior to conference. This means the online hustings becomes more important with the loss of Conference hustings. We are looking at ways of extending question opportunities and debates between candidates on the election portal. It is also felt that more support should be given in an attempt to make any podcasts more engaging.

9. That leaves the technical question of how we will implement the diminution in English SARs and addition of elected Faculty Reps. These questions are more difficult, especially given the unfortunate timing of the implementation of the OU move to “Super-Faculties”. My strong inclination is to allow English voters to elect three SARs without tying those reps to any geographical split and to resist the temptation to allocate specific sub-roles to those reps prior to the election. I suggest we leave such allocations to those elected including, obviously, the Vice President concerned.

10. The working group was also inclined to favour the Faculty Reps being elected on the basis of “Schools”. Most, if not necessarily all Faculties, currently favour setting up such sub-structures (e.g. Business or Law). There is a potential problem if one or two of the old Faculties fail to follow such a path and so become under-represented. Nevertheless we cannot delay our decision indefinitely and in my opinion we should be ready to make adjustments later in the light of developments.
11. The committee should also note that although elections are now subject to One Member One Vote other business resolutions are still a matter for Conference. Any change to that situation would depend on the 2017/2018 Rules Revision Convention and subsequent 2018 Conference.

David Humble
Vice President Administration