OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
18 – 20 March 2016

STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES (SARs) REPORTS FOR REGIONS & NATIONS

CEC is asked to:

i) receive the reports

ii) note that unless this paper is starred for discussion prior to the meeting, printed copies will not be supplied

Reports submitted by:-

SAR for Wales
SAR for Scotland
SAR for Northern Ireland
SAR for Southern Europe
Central Executive Committee (CEC)  
18 – 20 March 2016

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (SAR) FOR WALES

Wales Assembly Executive and Members

There is currently an online meeting taking place in the OU Students Association Wales Assembly forum that will run until Saturday 12 March. The assembly has not put members forward to be responsible for finances or communication and it is hoped this meeting will prompt some discussion about their activities.

Outcome of scrutiny by National Assembly of Wales Finance Committee of draft budget proposals for 2016

A response was submitted on 7 January 2016 to a call for information by the Finance Committee as part of its scrutiny of the draft budget proposals for 2016/17. A response was also submitted by the OU in Wales who substantially supported the student response as did Wendy Burrell. A couple of assembly members told me they were happy with what was in the submission.

On 9 February the Finance Minister announced that the reductions in the overall Higher Education budget would be less severe and that £5 million would be allocated to support part-time. A statement from Rob Humphreys, Director of the OU in Wales, can be read here: [http://www.open.ac.uk/wales/node/251](http://www.open.ac.uk/wales/node/251).

I really think this demonstrates the significance of the OU student voice in such matters and I hope that more of this sort of thing can be done in the future particularly as funding for part-time students continues to be put under pressure.

Consultation and New Students event in North Wales on 30 January 2016

The consultation for existing students and the preparing for OU study event held in Glyndwr University, Wrexham on 30 January 2016. Thank you to VP Representation and assembly member Lowri Smith for attending. The event itself was oversubscribed and while not everyone who was expected turned up on the day it was still very well attended.

Feedback from the event was positive and it was great to do something in North Wales as there has been very little activity in the area until now. The OU in Wales is keen to repeat with similar events for new students and to continue with an informal approach for the consultation event. Those who attended the consultation welcomed the opportunity to meet up with other students and discuss their studies.

There will be a consultation in Cardiff on Saturday 7 May 2016 and it is hoped that more assembly members will attend this event.
OU in Wales and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales meeting

I attended this meeting on 22 January 2016 with OU in Wales staff and members of the Council. With decisions pending regarding the budget for the council there was not much that they could clarify. They were very interested in the relationship between the OU Students Association and the OU in Wales and OU in general. They expressed surprise that there were no sabbatical officers and praised the commitment of OU students to volunteer their time.

It was explained that until they receive a remit letter from the government minister that sets their priorities for the next year it was difficult to be certain about how different funding priorities will be fulfilled. It was acknowledged that they are in a very difficult position but they expressed willingness to continue to support the OU in Wales and its students.

Social Meetings/Groups/Activities

The coffee meet-up for students in central Cardiff is continuing to meet although there will not be a March meeting as it clashes with The OU Social ‘Sheepy Shandy’ Part II event which was rescheduled for a week later than planned.

Lowri Smith hosted a coffee meet-up in Ruthin which was well received and there are others in the pipeline.

Social Media

The OUSA Wales Facebook group is continuing to grow and now has 348 members and there are 436 Twitter followers. Social media continues to prove more popular than the regional VLE forums although I try to post regularly in the VLE.

Other Updates

On 1 March I attended an OU in Wales session on retention where learner support, SSTs, ALs and each faculty was represented. It was an interesting session and I was thanked for providing the student point of view to the session.

Simon Horrocks, Assistant Director (Development, Learning and Teaching) has met with the chief executive of NUS Wales and the chief executive of NUS UK and is keen to move forward with a memorandum of understanding to ensure closer worker between the OU Students Association in Wales and NUS Wales.

Activities since last CEC meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 January &amp; 6 February 2016</td>
<td>OUSA Cardiff Coffee &amp; Chat</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 January 2016</td>
<td>OU in Wales and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 January 2016</td>
<td>Student consultative and new student event, Glyndwr University, Wrexham</td>
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</table>
Future Commitments

Saturday 2 April 2016  OUSA Cardiff Coffee & Chat
Wednesday 13 April 2016  Senate Reference Group meeting, Milton Keynes
Saturday 7 May 2016  Student consultative event, OU in Wales, Cardiff

Claire Smith
Student Association Representative Wales
As the time frame between CEC meetings has been short, this report will accordingly be shorter than normal.

Scottish Assembly

The OU Students Association in Scotland Assembly held its’ first meeting of the new Assembly year at the end of January with a number of issues discussed. Our approach to student engagement and our planned strategy continues to be a topic for discussion, with a summary provided for new members to the Assembly / Executive, as well as an outline of the work we have done in the previous year and what challenges we think that we face going forward as a group. Suggestions made in this area not only during the meeting, but since the start of the new Assembly year as to how we can move forward in this area to get more students engaged with us have been welcomed, such as a greater social media presence, it was pointed out that we already have a presence on Facebook and on Twitter so it may be worth looking at how that aspect could be enhanced further.

Training for our representatives also raised, with training that has in the past been carried out, such as for committee representatives on OU in Scotland committees cited as an example of this. The OU Students Association Conference was also a topic on the agenda and what we could do by way of activities, an update and feedback on the latest round of Study Skills workshops attended by our representatives and an update on the Student Feedback Forum. In the case of the latter, issues were raised around how we feed back to students on issues raised in the forum and it was felt a combination of social media, email and our regular newsletter would be a suitable way forward to do this. We now use a revamped PowerPoint presentation as part of our allocated slot during the skills workshops, however it is perhaps too early to ascertain how successful this has been in terms of content in engaging our students more.

OU in Scotland Committees

Scottish Working Committee took place in early February at the OU in Scotland office, in Edinburgh. Due to the weather and related transport issues at home, I joined in remotely (not an easy experience!). The date for this year’s Scottish Committee, the annual consultative meeting in Scotland will, after some confusion, take place in Edinburgh on Saturday, May 7th. For the first time we will have an OU Students Association in Scotland meeting as part of the day in line with other consultative meetings elsewhere. This is a good step forward and something I have been keen to have as part of the day itself’. As I write this report, a draft agenda has been sent out to myself and all Assembly/Executive members and asking for members to indicate attendance.
An induction booklet, created as an introduction to SWC/SC, with contributions from myself and an AL (Associate Lecturer) sitting on the committee was tabled at the meeting, with the intention for the booklet to be sent to new members in time for May’s Scottish Committee meeting. The induction package was warmly received by all. Other issues discussed were the possibility of moving committee meetings around the country, the possibility of tutorials being held at the Edinburgh office, the developing OU strategy and a self-evaluation report on the 2014/15 SFC Outcome Agreement, and a draft Agreement for 2016/17 was also tabled. A positive note was the introduction to the new Director, Scotland, Susan Stewart. Susan took up post at the beginning of December and as members may recall from my previous report, I met with her shortly before Christmas. Susan reiterated at the meeting that she was keen to engage with us more, which is very positive to hear.

Other Events

Since the last CEC meeting, I have attended the first meeting of the Student Communications and Feedback work stream, one of the work streams created following the Student Engagement Conference in November. One of the main areas to come out of the meeting was the creation of a Web presence which it is hoped would have interactive, more engaging content and ensure that the student voice is better represented. A small working group is going to be formed to look more at this. I also attended Student Experience Committee in February, in my capacity as a Central Representative.

Activities since last CEC meeting

25 January  Student Communications and Feedback Work stream meeting, Milton Keynes
27 January  OU Students Association Senate Reference Group, Milton Keynes
3 February  OU in Scotland Scottish Working Committee, Edinburgh
23 February Student Experience Committee, Milton Keynes

Diary Dates

18–20 March  CEC Meeting, Milton Keynes
24 March  Student Communications and Feedback workstream meeting, Milton Keynes
9 April  OU in the South East Consultative Meeting, Brighton
13 April  OU Students Association Senate Reference Group, Milton Keynes
23 April  OU in Yorkshire Consultative Meeting, Leeds
7 May  OU in Scotland Consultative Meeting, Edinburgh
14 May  OU in Ireland Consultative Meeting, Dublin
16 May  Student Experience Committee, Milton Keynes
8 June  OU Students Association Senate Reference Group, Milton Keynes
17 – 19 June  OU Students Association Conference, Milton Keynes

Mark Cameron
OUSA Student Association Representative for Scotland
Activities in the Northern Ireland Region

Despite a low turnout in the Northern Ireland (NI) Regional Assembly Elections held in November 2015 (with only 16 votes cast) the NI Regional Assembly has seen a renewed vigour with 3 members elected to the Assembly Executive team. Arnold Stewart, Cinnomen McGuigan and Dave Milliken were elected to the NI Assembly and have played a full and active role in the OU Students Association NI activities over the past few months.

Cinnomen McGuigan has taken on the role of OU Students Association NI social media coordinator. As well as managing the Association’s NI Facebook page Cinnomen is currently investigating the feasibility of starting an OU Students Association NI Blog and joining an existing Facebook group as an Association NI Rep. This group has existed for sometime and although it has limited activity represents an opportunity to engage with the wider student body. Cinnomen has also volunteered for the role of Ceremony Co-ordinator for 2016.

Arnold Stewart has been selected as the NI representative on the Senate Reference Group and will attend his first meeting in April. Arnold has a particular interest in creating opportunities to engage with stakeholders in the wider higher education sector and has a strong interest in ensuring the voice of Open University students is heard at a political level.

As new representatives Arnold and Cinnomen will both attend the Assembly Representative Seminar Training in Milton Keynes in March.

Social Events

Since my last report OU Students Association NI have held 2 face to face social events. These were well attended and we welcomed some new students along to our social gatherings. A number of students found out about the social events via the recent Freshers Facebook chat. One new student has been very enthusiastic and is keen to volunteer locally; currently she is hoping to host a German discussion group for OU language students.

Political Engagement

Since my last report the Department for Employment and Learning have announced changes to the student support package available to part time learners. The new
package will be of particular interest to those students in Northern Ireland who do not qualify for the existing fee grant, as changes will give student access to a loan for tuition fees. Full details can be found here: https://www.delni.gov.uk/news/farry-announces-new-support-system-expand-part-time-undergraduate-study

I was invited to attend a workshop on partnership and student engagement at the OU office in Belfast. The event was attended by student and staff representatives of Northern Ireland universities and further education colleges and provided insight into different approaches taken to student partnerships and barriers to participation.

Dave Milliken and Arnold Stewart attended the Open University winter reception at parliament buildings as representatives of the OU Students Association. They had the opportunity to meet with students and politicians at the event celebrating 'the power of part time Higher Education in Northern Ireland. Further information can be found online here: www.open.ac.uk/northern-ireland/news/celebrating-power-part-time-higher-education-northern-ireland

The Open University hosted a meeting of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Employment and Learning Committee at the OU Office in Belfast. Afterwards I attended a reception for members of the committee to meet with OU students to discuss the impact of part time/distance study. It was a good opportunity to share our experience with the committee members, although due to the late running of the meeting time was limited for some students who were attending during their lunch break, likewise not all committee members were able to stay for the meeting with students. Further information can be found here: www.open.ac.uk/northern-ireland/news/open-university-hosts-visit-committee-employment-and-learning

Recently I attended the launch of the NUS-USI manifesto and met with NUS-USI president, Fergal McFerran. The meeting helped both myself and Fergal think about ways we might learn from each other and work together in the future. I provided a brief overview of the OUSA structure and discussed some of the issues affecting part time and distance learners. OUSA representatives may be able to access training opportunities with NUS-USI.

Other Activities

As well as regional activities I have also attended a number of activities on campus in Milton Keynes. These include the ongoing work of the OU Students Association Community Engagement Tool Project, which is now conducting a 'proof of concept' on the use of Yammer; the concluded National Students Survey (NSS) task force project and the ongoing work of the Student Engagement Project (Student Feedback and Communications Work Stream).

The NSS task force focused almost exclusively on ensuring the University achieved the required response rate for this years student survey. The OU Students Association provided the task force with a detailed presentation on how other institutions promote the NSS. Early indications are that the OU is set to achieve an NSS response rate of over 50%, which is needed for the results to be made publicly available.

The Student Engagement Project (Student Feedback and Communications Work
Stream) has held one meeting and presents a good opportunity to develop increased awareness of the many ways students can give feedback to and about the University. I have volunteered to take part in a sub group of the Work Stream which will focus on creating a website related to these issues.

I have also been engaged in regular online discussion as a member of the Conference Steering Group Committee.

Activities since last C E C report (at a glance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Nov</td>
<td>Combined Communications Conference</td>
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<td>12 Nov</td>
<td>Student Partnerships Event hosted by Department for</td>
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<td>Employment and Learning</td>
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<td>13 Nov</td>
<td>Community Engagement Tool Project Meeting</td>
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<td>13 – 15 Nov</td>
<td>CEC</td>
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<td>21 Nov</td>
<td>Open Book Club</td>
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<td>21 Nov</td>
<td>OU Students Association NI Social</td>
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<td>1 Dec</td>
<td>NSS Task force meeting (online)</td>
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<td>9 Dec</td>
<td>OU Student Radio</td>
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<td>13 Jan</td>
<td>NSS Task force meeting (online)</td>
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<td>13 Jan</td>
<td>DEL Lunch</td>
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<td>22 – 24 Jan</td>
<td>CEC</td>
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<td>25 Jan</td>
<td>Student Engagement Project – Student Feedback and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communications Work Stream</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Jan</td>
<td>Facebook Event 'Welcome to OU student Community'</td>
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<td>26 Jan</td>
<td>Facebook Event 'Societies Fair'</td>
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<td>27 Jan</td>
<td>Senate Reference Group and Senate Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Jan</td>
<td>Facebook Event 'meeting OU students in your area'</td>
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<td>30 Jan</td>
<td>OU Students Association NI Assembly Executive Meeting</td>
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<td>30 Jan</td>
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<td>3 Feb</td>
<td>NSS Task force meeting (online)</td>
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<td>5 Feb</td>
<td>NUS-USI Student Manifesto Launch</td>
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<td>11 Feb</td>
<td>Central Representatives Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Feb</td>
<td>Meeting with NUS-USI President Fergal McFerran</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 Feb</td>
<td>CEC member at OU Student Consultation (London)</td>
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Future Commitments

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 March</td>
<td>University mental health day (online awareness)</td>
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<td>17 March</td>
<td>OU Digital Archive Launch</td>
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<td>17 March</td>
<td>The Future of Academic Libraries Symposium</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 – 20 March</td>
<td>CEC</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 March</td>
<td>Student Engagement Project – Student Feedback and</td>
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<td>Communications Work Stream</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 April</td>
<td>Senate Reference Group and Senate Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>Open University Award Ceremony (Dublin)</td>
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<td>14 May</td>
<td>Officer meeting, invited as member of Conference Steering Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 May</td>
<td>Open University Student Consultation (Belfast)</td>
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8 June    Senate Reference Group and Senate Meeting
17-19 June OU Student Association Conference
22 – 24 July CEC – Handover Weekend

Nicola Simpson
Student Association Representative for Northern Ireland
Central Executive Committee (CEC)
18 – 20 March 2016

REPORT OF THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (SAR) FOR SOUTHERN EUROPE

The OUSA VLE forums have been relatively quiet as usual.

Facebook group members: S.Europe 250; Greece 170; France 133; Spain 223; Italy 88; SA Switzerland 186. All Facebook groups have been relatively quiet with the exception of some posts about degree recognition issues at the Greek group. OUSA & OU events are regularly shared to all relevant Facebook groups.

OUSA Southern Europe twitter account has 71 followers and 123 tweets: @OUSASEurope.

Future Commitments in 2016

13th March 2016: Athens face to face meeting (cut the pita event).

Michail Kasoutas
Student Association Representative for Southern Europe