CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)
18 – 20 March 2016

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (C E C) held between 18 – 20 March 2016 at Kent’s Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT
Ruth Tudor - President
David Humble – VP Administration
Lorraine Adams - VP Communications
Josh Brumpton - VP Education Policy
Peter Cowan - VP Educational Support & Research
Sue Goodyear – VP Representation
Alison Kingan - VP Student Support
Carey Shaw – OU Council Member
Claire Lannigan – South & South West
Mark Cameron – Scotland
Claire Smith – Wales
Nicci Simpson – Northern Ireland
Michail Kasoutas - Southern Europe
Derek Naysmith – Arts Faculty Rep
Dave Milliken – MCT Faculty Rep
Jan Thompson – FELS Faculty Rep
David Reed – Science Faculty Rep
Nicki Hadjipanteli – FBL Faculty Rep
Melanie Philpott – Open Degree Faculty Rep

IN ATTENDANCE
Steph Stubbins – DSG Observer
Greg Vaughan – Societies Observer
Rob Avann - General Manager
Wendy Burrell – Deputy General Manager
Magda Hadrys – Head of Operations
Jess Smith – Head of Engagement & Support
Leanne Quainton – Executive Assistant
Pooja Sinha – Research & Information Officer (part)
Beth Metcalf – Project Lead for Student Rep Induction (part)

SECTION A: INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

1. PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

The President welcomed everyone to the meeting as well as giving a special welcome to the two observers in attendance, Steph Stubbins from the Disabled Students Group (DSG) and Greg Vaughan from the Societies Committee. Beth Metcalf was also in attendance for part of the meeting prior to starting her new 6-month role with the staff team as Project Lead for Student Rep Induction.
2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Nik Morris - Deputy President
Christian Klein – Northern Europe

3. MINUTES

3.1 The Minutes (CEC 1/16/M) from the January 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 CEC 3/16/1

6. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF STUDENT ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES (S A Rs) FOR REGIONS AND NATIONS CEC 3/16/2

7. RECEIVED: OFFICER & COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS CEC 3/16/3

8. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT CEC 3/16/4

9. RECEIVED: CEC REMITS CEC 3/16/5

SECTION C: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

10. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES CEC 3/16/6

10.1 The General Manager went through the report, highlighting the work undertaken by the BoT since the last meeting. Stone King had been appointed as the Association’s legal services provider following bids being received from two reputable firms. Beth Metcalf was in attendance at the meeting, having been appointed on a 6 month contract as Project Lead of Student Rep Induction, due to start 4 April 2016. Trustees had approved the recruitment for this new role that would focus on creating a comprehensive handover and induction for the new CEC team following Conference in June. This will include various training opportunities and an improved Handover Weekend in July.

11. OUSA MODULE DELIVERY RESEARCH UPDATE CEC 3/16/7

11.1 The Research and Information Officer gave the latest update on the project highlighting that in follow-up to the pilot study in November 2015, a larger survey
targeting 2,000 students is in the pipeline which will hopefully generate a good response and evidence base. The results of the survey will give an in-depth student view on the themes of study habits and how students use online/onscreen and print delivery. It will be used as evidence on the general position of students with the University when it comes to any policy changes and module creation. No other research on this topic has been done by the University and it is therefore a valuable piece of work.

11.2 The start and close dates for the survey will be confirmed once the Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) has given final sign-off, it will remain open for 3 weeks until Mid-April. Findings will go to LTS, IET and module design teams. The CEC will be encouraged to take it to the committees they attend to get to as wide an audience as possible. VP Student Support asked for SeGA (Securing Greater Accessibility) to be added to the list of recipients.

12. STUDENT CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

12.1 The General Manager went through the paper, highlighting the regional consultative meetings held to date. There was concern over the drop-out rate of the four held this year so far, as all meetings were vastly over-subscribed, with 30 places then given but only 8 – 17 students attending on the day. The large Assessment Policy document sent to all attendees for reading prior to the meeting could have been a factor in the amount of non-attendance and that is being addressed for the April meetings. The CEC were in favour of a more open process that would allow all interested students to attend rather than limiting to 30, knowing that there will be drop-outs on the day. It is unlikely that the University would allow unlimited numbers but a better system is needed with the possibility of a reserve list and allowing students to attend other regional meetings if locations are more convenient.

12.2 The Student Consultative Executive will continue to monitor the process and communicate with the University on better ways of improvement.

13. CEC EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW

13.1 All CEC Members had been invited to participate in the survey that was created to collect opinion on the CEC roles and meetings to better enable staff in how best to support members and facilitate the meetings and content.

13.2 The Research and Information Officer ran through various discussion points with members that generated the below suggestions and views;

- The important discussion papers needed for meetings to be produced (where possible) in the first mailing to allow for adequate reading time.
- Papers to be as succinct as possible so not to overload members with reading.
- The VLE is not the ideal area to store papers as it’s cumbersome and hard to locate documents to see the history. Another platform could be investigated.
- An Executive Summary could be included on each paper (where possible/appropriate).
- Better training for members is needed at the start of their term e.g. SharePoint; Outlook; Report writing.
• Officer/SAR reports that are published for each meeting, need to be improved to include more information. Training to be provided on this.
• The Outlook calendar could be better utilised to enable members to share diaries.
• More updates from the Central Reps and what’s going on at the University in general would be beneficial.
• The CEC would value more opportunity to meet with Association staff.
• To have a better understanding of University structures.
• Social media to be better utilised by members. The Exec could be talking more about the CEC weekends highlighting the agenda items and the senior OU staff members attending to raise awareness.
• Podcast parts of CEC meetings could be an option in the future.

13.3 **ACTION:** The Research and Information Officer to update the report and circulate to members. In the meantime all comments will be taken on board as part of the planning for Induction and handover for the next term.

14. **QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY (QAA) DRAFT ACTION PLAN**

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

15. **REGIONS REVIEW PROJECT**

15.1 The recommendations from the external review that looked at restructuring how the OU Students Association works in the English regions was presented to the CEC in January where there was common agreement on the suggested model. The introduction of a new layer of volunteers, Learning Experience Reporters would support Faculty Association Representatives and VP Representation and Research on the ground. The social level would come through encouraging a network of local groups with a central resource in the office to support, encourage and promote, opening up the level of volunteering opportunities available.

15.2 The paper detailed the work taken place by the working group so far which included:
• Student Association Representatives (SARs) to be changed to Area Association Representatives (AARs) to better explain the nature of these posts.
• The proposed new level of volunteers, Learning Experience Reporters will be tested as a pilot project to determine the level of interest. This will likely be once the newly elected FARs are in place in August 2016.
• It was agreed there was a need for an English Executive to bring England in line with the Celtic nations. Their role would be to encourage and support local groups, volunteering and local activities.

15.3 The Working Group had recommended that the Celtic Nations be included in the changed structure and to move forward working together on implementation. It was noted that the Nations are already working with FARs and AARs and Assembly Executives, the only distinction would be that they would lose the Assemblies.

15.4 VP Administration approved of the proposals but raised concern over the role of the English Executive and what purpose they would have, but was happy to see how it
progresses. It was also noted that a good mechanism for sharing information between the FARs and the Learning Experience Reporters will be vital for these roles to work.

15.5 Following the face to face Assembly Members Seminar, discussions continue online to allow other current Assembly members to be involved.

15.6 **ACTION:** It was noted that Northern Ireland had expressed to be included in the restructure not the Republic of Ireland. Deputy General Manager to make the change to the paper.

15.7 **RESOLUTION:** Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to be included in the plans.

16. **ENTRY PROJECT**  

16.1 Nick Hamp, Senior Project Manager was in attendance on behalf of Liz Marr, Director of Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships to present on the Entry Project.

16.2 The new policy is aligned to the University’s mission and values, whilst maximising student success. The lack of an admissions policy had been questioned by the QAA, and there are also concerns about risk of mis-selling as it is not necessarily clear that taking on OU study is a real challenge. Consultation has taken place with staff, Associate Lecturers’ (ALs), students and the project advisory group. The staff & student feedback from the consultation was shared with the CEC.

16.3 Nick highlighted the reasons behind the need for the Entry project particularly following the move towards qualifications which has changed the context on what open entry means. Open entry remains an underlying principle of the University and the University is committed to this principle but where people start their studies is becoming more important. Nick explained that the variety of entry points is not obvious to students through current general enquirer pages on the website. Some students are perhaps starting at too low a level, others might be starting at too advanced a level. Support tends to be better once you become a student, rather than before you start. Some students will only need or want to study a couple of modules, and this would not necessarily be clear on the existing website. Also, Access courses are not clearly visible. Information needs to be made available in a timely manner, particularly when considering students who may need to arrange DSA and alternative formats. If the University gets entry right, retention and progression should improve.

16.4 A possible proposal was that a type of quiz could be embedded into the current enquirer journey, as part of the new student seamless journey although the consequences of a quiz being made a compulsory element was concerning to some CEC members. The potential quiz questions were discussed and there was some apprehension from the CEC around questions relating to the amount of time available to study as it’s so variable from student to student. It was noted that the increased time requirement for students with disabilities should be fed in right at the start. Previous academic attainment also raised concern around this being off putting and intimidating to students. Feedback received from some students would be that this question should not be included, others think that this is important to enable students to complete their studies more successfully.
16.5 Once the policy is agreed, the focus will shift towards how this might be implemented. The project team will be pushing for students to receive feedback throughout. The first draft went to VCE for discussion early March and will go to Senate in April. The final proposal will go to Senate in June.

17. **STUDENT RECRUITMENT & SUPPORT CENTRES (SRSC) EXECUTIVE GROUP**

17.1 Since Council approved the Locations Analysis in November 2015, the President and General Manager have been members of the SRSC Executive Group overseeing the detailed implementation which planning is taking place. Full details of this are in the paper.

17.2 The President highlighted that the Nation Offices will revert to how they were prior to the Student Support Team (SST) implementation and SSTs will be located in the 3 English offices. VP Student Support added that there are plans for a new Disabled Student Support Team which is being discussed at the next Inclusion meeting.

17.3 The CEC asked about the numbers of regional office staff being lost through the restructure to which the President advised that there is no overall picture yet. The annual recruitment of temporary staff is currently underway for the 16J Presentation with the intention of these staff members staying on to permanent full time to keep consistency and experience for the following presentations. The Milton Keynes Team that was in place for the February presentation will also stay on for 16J.

17.4 **ACTION:** The General Manager will see if a site visit can be made as part of the new CEC inductions as the OU are keen for staff to meet with students.

18. **PREVENT**

18.1 The Deputy General Manager advised of the OU Students Association’s involvement with the university in responding to the new Prevent legislation that outlines the duties on the prevention of students being drawn into terrorism. The OU has a statutory duty to work with the Association on the legislation however it will only affect the Association where we have organised activity on OU systems/venues i.e. the VLE Forums. The Deputy General Manager reiterated that no additional activity or work will be necessary for staff or student moderators, but if any unusual or suspecting behaviour is flagged, then the OU’s Prevent Panel is to be alerted who will then look into the situation. That is where the Association’s involvement ends.

18.2 Mentor Moderators have been advised and training will be given to members of the staff team in April before all the Moderators/Groups are then contacted. In due course, references to Prevent will need to be included in our paperwork. Further discussions will be needed with regards to extending to public speaking at Conference and what we need to be aware of.

19. **EMERGING OU STRATEGY**

19.1 The Vice Chancellor, Peter Horrocks was in attendance to present on the emerging strategy for the OU. He started by reporting on some good news on the improving
political environment. In the recent budget announcement, the government advised of some policy changes in the OU’s favour which included loans for maintenance for part-time; masters loans for part-time; relaxation of equivalent or lower qualification (ELQ) rules in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) etc. There was also an announcement for a review into ‘gaps in support for lifetime learning’ which will be a great opportunity for the OU to feed into. The annual funding letter from BIS to HEFCE contained support of Wider Access Learning which is all good news for the Open University and the VC thanked the OU Students Association for the support given. The final piece of positive news was that the OU had won a court case against the HMRC and been awarded the 52.7million. This external context has given the University an increased appetite to be more ambitious, which is reflected in the Strategy.

19.2 The Strategy, named ‘Students First’ draws on ideas from the OU when it was first founded, taking the vision back to base purely on quality and openness and puts increased student numbers at the heart. The VC highlighted how the landscape had changed with participation in HE increasing from under 15% to now close to 50%. In 1968 the OU was one of only 49 universities in the UK – there are now 138. History had shown a rise in student numbers throughout the first 40years of the OU being founded but this number has fallen sharply since 2011/12. The proportion of students gaining a qualification is also declining which the strategy hopes to turn around.

19.3 The VC showed the summary version of the strategy with the vision “To reach more students with life-changing learning that meets their needs and enriches society”. This is underpinned by four main objectives; More students qualifying; Employability and Career Progression; Academic Excellence and; Income Diversification and Cost Control.

19.4 The draft strategy has been developed through various engagement events and channels and students were asked for their views through the consultation forum. Students were asked for their comments in changes to the strategy, with the 3 most significant received being:

‘The important aim must be to enable students to fulfill their objectives - and their objective may not necessarily be to gain an undergraduate (or even postgraduate) degree’.

‘When we talk about employability skills we should be looking at the generic skills that any employer will find useful and not just the specific skill set that a single one / small group will require’.

‘The inclusion of a commitment to students having a personal contact’.

19.5 Two workshops have been held that focused on ‘More Students Qualifying’ that generated a lot of ideas around the greater involvement of Associate Lecturers in pastoral support as well as more help in getting on the right course and given the right advice and right preparation. The second was around Academic Excellence and the meaning of this. The workshop thought that Academic Excellence is achieved through teaching and learning, research and internal engagement.

19.6 The term ‘qualifying’ is being looked at as a broad definition about study that can mean other things as well as getting a degree. The OU will be creating apprenticeships which will be defined as a qualification as well as more emphasis on certificates and
diplomas as a way of getting students into the OU who might not yet know what direction to take. Broader qualifications will be provided to increase the numbers of students who are 'qualifying' and further support will be there to help them succeed to their goal. The VC highlighted the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) that would be damaging for the OU as it shouldn’t be assessed on degree completion and are waiting to hear the final assessment of this. It is important that the OU is measured according to OU Student’s needs, not comparable to other universities.

19.7 The CEC spoke in depth about the new vision which was supported by the majority of members who approved the inclusion of the phrasing regarding enriching society.

19.8 The VC highlighted how the strategy will be achieved. For more students to qualify will mean courses being reviewed, diplomas a more viable option, clearer information on the website, better preparation and support for students choosing their study path and pathway choices. There is already much good work going on throughout the university to help students succeed but a greater coherent approach is needed. For employability, the OU are investing in an employability service to help students be more aware of their increased employability skills as well as working with employers to recognise OU study.

19.9 The Vision will go to Senate in April followed by Council in May 2016. The Senate paper will have further information on KPI’s so students will have a further opportunity to comment then.

20. **PAYMENT FOR OFFCERS**

20.1 The General Manager outlined the paper highlighting that since the original proposal that had been brought to the CEC last year, further discussions had been held with the BoT and advice sought from external consultants Righthand HR, who had undertaken detailed analysis of the issues involved and Stone King, our legal advisors who had ensured compliance with our Constitution. It had been agreed that Model D ‘a paid President and Deputy President with a volunteer support team’ may be the best fit for the Association. It was advised that the decision on whether to implement payment and the finer details of this rests with the Board of Trustees however, the General Manager wanted the CEC’s views before the next Trustee meeting.

20.2 Lengthy discussions were had around whether the suggestion of payment part time at 0.5 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) truly reflected the amount of time and work put in by the President and Deputy President and whether full time would be more appropriate. The General Manager advised that it was decided not to explore full time roles because this would limit the amount of students that could apply for posts due to practical issues and the intention is to keep positions open to all. There would be a danger that if they were full time roles, that the University would also have an expectation that for individuals to be on campus during the week and asking a student to relocate to Milton Keynes was not an option as this would significantly reduce eligible students. The part time figure means students can remain flexible with their time and other responsibilities. It was highlighted that the amount of the salary figure paid will be down to the Trustees to approve.
20.3 The implications on tax and benefits were noted as this will cause issues amongst some applicants. The General Manager has asked whether the student would be able to waive the payment if from a point of principle that they wanted to remain a volunteer, however this could not be done if the reason were that it impacted in any benefits received. It would be up to the student to consider the implications this would have.

20.4 The increased engagement asked of the Association by the OU was discussed and the additional pressure this has put on the President. Many OU staff still do not realise that students are not based on campus and are not available like a staff member can be. Greater inclusion of staff members needs to be explored further to assist with demands as well as more delegation to other Officers. The General Manager highlighted that discussions with the university about study breaks for Association Officers were ongoing.

20.5 The BoT, with advice from our legal advisors will decide the type of contract, whether it is employment or contract for services and will consider the issues involved in being paid members of staff around any disciplinary procedures and performance monitoring.

20.6 RESOLUTION: The CEC recommended that Trustees give due consideration to implementing the recommended Model D, a part time paid President and Deputy President, paid for Officer duties only. Trustees will discuss whether they should be paid at the rate of part time, 0.5 FTE.

20.7 ACTION: Detail given to Conference needs to be simple and easy to understand. Background information to be available throughout Conference, maybe in the form of a stand and comment box.

20.8 ACTION: General Manager to undertake further consultation or research before Conference, including a possible student consultation.

21. CONFERENCE 2016

21.1 The Head of Engagement and Support ran through the work undertaken to date by the Association Staff and the Conference Steering Committee. The election portal is now live generating a good buzz on social media and in the discussion forums. The business agenda is being drafted with all the business again being held on Saturday morning. FAQs are available on the Conference webpage which is now live and these can be updated as and when new queries come in. 250 students have registered on the interested students list, who will receive email notification when registration opens 24hrs before everyone else. An in-house system of registering will be used this year rather than Eventbrite which caused issues in 2014. Programme planning is underway with internal speakers being secured and awaiting on confirmation from some external.

21.2 All members of the CEC get an automatic place at Conference although they still have to go through the registering procedure. It was confirmed that this will include the 5 Faculty Association Representatives.
21.3 VP Representation praised the online portal especially the diagrams which really help in explaining the Association and roles available.

22. GROUP TUITION POLICY CEC 3/16/18

22.1 Michael Flack, Assistant Director (Programmes) within the Learning and Teaching Centre gave an overview of the new policy, advising that the Learning and Teaching Centre are working on two large projects, the Assessment Programme and Group Tuition Policy.

22.2 Michael went through the main features of the policy and intended benefits. Module teams will be asked to state the purpose of tutorial events within module design so students know what the intended outcomes will be. Tutorials will therefore be integrated into module design.

22.3 It is intended that advanced notification of the timetable will be available up to 3 months before module start (due to be fully implemented by 2018) although there are challenges to overcome in achieving this in terms of tutor student allocation. Students will be able to book tutorials in advance via StudentHome which will help with planning. The functionality of the existing tutorial finder will be built in to the new system.

22.4 When a student registers, they will be assigned to a tutor, of a similar group size to what is already existing. Then, the student will be assigned to cluster of 6-8 tutor groups. All tutorial events within the student’s cluster will be visible. When it comes to face to face events, students will also be able to see events happening outside their cluster. Another feature of the policy is that there will be an online version of each tutorial event in order to widen opportunity for students to attend online events. The aim is that it will boost attendance and participation but the impact will need to be reviewed. Clustering should allow for more efficient use of tutor hours. This should allow for provision of more face to face events, in different venues, which should allow more choice for students. It could also free up time for more one to one support for tutors/students.

22.5 Michael assured the CEC that it won’t become an entirely mechanical process. Regional staff are already making tutorial arrangements in advance and conversations with ALs and Staff Tutors will continue to happen in advance.

22.6 The new system is due to be working before May 2016 presentations although the focus is on October presentation which present more challenges because of student numbers. This presentation will incorporate many of the features of the policy including 1 months’ notice of tutorials dates. Full implementation of policy will take effect by Feb 2018. By May 2017, it is expected there will be 3 months’ notice of tutorials. The Students Association, ALs, and the University all have a role to play in communication with students.

22.7 CEC members held a lengthy discussion about the online booking system with regards to late cancellations, students block booking tutorials making them appear ‘full’ and implications to those students that do not have regular access to the internet. Michael advised that ongoing monitoring and evaluation will assess how the process is working
These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the CEC

and Faculties and staff will be very careful in the early stages of this to review the effectiveness of the introduction of the booking system. He hopes that scheduling tutorials in advance will help with commitment to tutorials going ahead to decrease the number of cancellations and under this new policy, the University should be in a better position to find alternative tutors if needed.

22.7 The Northern Ireland SAR asked about the clustering for Northern Ireland students and other areas with low density and how far those students would be expected to travel. The importance of choice for students is a vital factor and there are currently big barriers for some students to get to tutorials. Michael advised that the idea behind clustering is to improve student experience by increasing numbers of students at events. Some modules, in some areas will not experience increased numbers. In Ireland and Wales there is a risk that there will be less.

23. PROPOSAL FOR HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP CEC 3/16/19

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

SECTION D: ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

24. RECEIVED: STUDENT COMMUNITY TOOL CEC 3/16/20

24.1 ACTION: The Deputy General Manager to set up a discussion thread on Yammer to get feedback on the Yammer platform.

25. RECEIVED: UPDATE ON THE OU STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECT CEC 3/16/20

26. GENERAL MANAGER’S BUSINESS

26.1 None recorded.

27. PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS

28. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

28.1 It was confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be part of the Handover weekend on 22 – 24 July 2016.