CENTRAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (CEC)  
14 – 16 October 2016

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held over the weekend of 14 – 16 October 2016 at Kent’s Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT
Lorraine Adams – VP Education
Cath Brown – Faculty Association Rep Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM)
Peter Cowan – VP Administration
Sarah Couling – Area Association Rep England
Victoria Crawford – Area Association Rep England
Cherry Day – VP Equal Opportunities
Amelia Gackowska – Area Association Rep Continental Europe
Patricia Gray – Area Association Rep Scotland
Rachel Hughes – VP Communications (via telephone)
Alison Kingan - VP Student Support
Cinnomen McGuigan – Area Association Rep Northern Ireland
Chris Pane – President (Chair)
Caroline Poppenga – VP Representation and Research
Anca Seaton – Area Association Rep England
Nicci Simpson – Deputy President
Jamie Slater – Faculty Association Rep Business and Law (FBL)
Steph Stubbins – VP Community
Barbara Tarling – Student OU Council Member
Jan Thompson – Faculty Association Rep Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies (WELS)

IN ATTENDANCE
Rob Avann - General Manager
Wendy Burrell – Deputy General Manager
David McCann – Head of Digital Communications
Beth Metcalf – Head of Volunteering
Leanne Quainton – Executive Assistant (minutes)
Pooja Sinha – Research & Information Officer (part)
Jess Smith – Head of Student Community
These Minutes will remain subject to approval until the next meeting of the CEC

INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

The President welcomed everyone to the first CEC meeting of the 2016-18 term.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None to record. The President did take the opportunity to report the resignation of Ally Parsons (Faculty Association Rep Arts & Social Sciences) and Norman Kay (Faculty Association Rep Open Programme). A Bye Election for these positions and the other vacant post will be held in the New Year.

C. MINUTES

C.1 The Minutes (CEC 7/16/M) from the July meeting were approved. Minor corrections that were sent through to the office were included and no others were raised.

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

D.1 None recorded.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL AND REPORT

1. RECEIVED: REPORT OF AFFILIATED SOCIETIES CEC 10/16/1

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES CEC 10/16/2

3. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES CEC 10/16/3

4. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE OFFICERS & OU STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBER CEC 10/16/4

4.1 The President was asked to expand on some of the activities included in his report. He advised that he had been in regular communications with OU staff as well as some conversations via social media with students although he was finding it difficult to sustain that level of communications due to the other demands on his time. He explained that he had been in liaison with the OU regarding the issues around Group Tuition although admitted a personal statement should have been released from him to the student body. The President promised that communications to the student population as well as the CEC will be something that he improves upon.
4.2 The President suggested the inclusion of images that capture events for CEC reports to help appeal more to the student body, however it was mainly felt that CEC reports should be kept as a formal record and visuals used for other platforms such as the website, OU Students magazine and on social media. The CEC agreed to make greater use of methods of communication.

5. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT

6. REPORT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

6.1 The General Manager introduced the report from the Board of Trustees, which is a regular update to each CEC meeting and a formal opportunity for members to raise any questions relating to the Trustees. The BoT held its last meeting on 22 September 2016.

6.2 VP Student Support sought more information about the proposal to recruit a Student Support staff team in the office. The role and remit of this new team is still in the early stages of being investigated and advice is being sought from the Association’s HR consultants. Student support currently sits within the Student Community Team together with engagement, making this a large remit. Having a separate Student Support team will make the workload more manageable enabling a team to focus solely on supporting students. VP Student Support will be consulted as discussions continue.

7. NATIONAL STUDENTS SURVEY (NSS) RESULTS 2016

7.1 Pooja Sinha, Research and Information Officer highlighted the key areas of the report, explaining that the NSS is a survey carried out every year that ranks the OU in a league table against other higher education institutions.

7.2 The OU Students Association has one question in the survey, Q23 ‘I am satisfied with the students’ Union (Association or Guild) at my institution’. Satisfaction has remained the same from 2015 at 62% in 2016. Awareness fluctuates between the different demographic student groups over the years, with this year showing male and ‘not known ethnicity’ students having least awareness and fit. The information gathered in this report can be used for targeted communications to help the Association in raising these figures.

7.3 Pooja ran through the broader issues within the survey, one being the sheer numbers of students studying with the OU meaning the sample eligible to fill in the survey is several times that of other institutions. A 50% response rate is needed and in 2016 over 28,000 students were eligible, of which over 14,000 completed (52%). It remains a difficult task to meet the response threshold which the OU spend a disproportionate amount of time trying to achieve, compared to areas where time could be better spent.
i.e. greater analysis of the results and improved feedback to students on what is being done to enhance underachieving areas.

7.4 The biggest concern is the change to the Student Union question following the review last year which will be implemented in 2017. The question now reads ‘The Students Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests’. This statement was thought not to adequately reflect the work done by the Students Association. The CEC agreed that this is not the question that they would have chosen and although students do have involvement in their curriculum through sitting on Committees and Boards of Study, the average student is not going to agree with the statement. This is one to monitor next year.

7.4 The Deputy President highlighted the plans for a Student Voice week in conjunction with the OU’s Consultation Office which will include awareness of the NSS survey. The CEC will be asked for input into what else can be incorporated into this week that will celebrate students having their say in how the OU is run.

8. OU STUDENT ASSOCIATION STRATEGY UPDATE CEC 10/16/8

8.1 The General Manager introduced the Strategy Update noting that its first anniversary will be November 2016 when it should be reviewed. A more detailed conversation will be held at the January meeting to look at what changes and updates are needed to the document one year on. A big area of debate is individual representation and whether that is an area the Association wants to take forward.

8.2 VP Communications advised of her intention to re-run the AL & OU Staff Awareness Survey that previously took place in 2014. This survey looks at the understanding the AL and staff members have of the Association.

8.3 The Deputy President recommended creating a fun, animated summary of the strategy to help make this important document more useable and accessible to students to help them better understand the vision and mission of the Association.

9. NEW STUDENTS SURVEY CEC 10/16/9

9.1 This is an annual survey run by IET (Institute of Educational Technology) to all new students about how they are finding their student experience. The Association has 2 questions in the survey which are analysed to identify ways in which we can better engage with new students and raise the awareness of the Association’s work.

9.2 Awareness of the Association is good at 72% however the understanding of the Association remains low at only 16% which is something that we continue to address. The Research & Information Officer highlighted that she would like to propose a change to the question in next years survey to delve deeper and and ask students where they would look for certain information, which would help us better understand how and when students engage.

9.3 Some views of the CEC were that they felt that these figures were disappointing and that it appeared that the work put into projects like Freshers Week did not seem to be helping in increasing awareness. It was pointed out that students are still in early stages of study at this point so that fact they knew about the Association was positive.
The elections saw a large number of younger students voting and the more we do around offering volunteer opportunities and new skills will help raise this.

10. CONFERENCE EVALUATION REPORT

10.1 The Head of Student Community previewed the new Conference video which the Executive agreed was a hugely positive and professional film. She highlighted that the 4 Conference objectives set at the beginning of the year had been achieved. Those were:

- To build excitement and understanding around the elections
- Ensure students attending Conference were aware it is a Students Association event.
- Excite and inspire students to continue their involvement in the Association after Conference
- Generate an understanding of the importance of the business elements of Conference.

10.2 The issue of how to reduce non-attendance was discussed as this figure had increased on last year even with the additional communications to try to reduce the drop-outs/no-shows. Suggestions were made, however it was noted that even though there is a monetary cost to those that don’t turn up on the day, the real cost is to those students that wanted to attend but couldn’t because of those non-attenders. A way to help mitigate this is needed.

10.3 Business will be a bigger factor in Conference 2018 due to the constitutional changes so further work will be needed in communicating the importance of this in 2018. It was agreed that more information is needed for students to better understand what they are voting for and the consequences of their vote. Video explanations could help with this for user-friendly and interesting promotion of the subject. The Rules Revision Weekend is scheduled for November 2017, leaving a long lead up to Conference that could be utilised to raise awareness of the business in the Conference campaign. Other suggestions were to split the business session up as well as decreasing the election results time. It was agreed that we should continue to have no other activities taking place during the business session over the weekend.

10.4 Popularity of the workshops was discussed and how to avoid turning delegates away from popular sessions. It was highlighted that the staff team would be a bigger in 2018 so a booking system could be revisited for some of the workshops that would give an indication of interest in each session.

10.5 How the election process is run will be up for debate and part of a full review of the process before 2018.

11. STUDENT CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

11.1 The General Manager introduced the paper highlighting the dates of the consultative meetings in the first half of 2017. Scotland has now set their date for 6 May and Ireland have a draft date of 8 April. The meeting date for Wales is still outstanding. The international online meeting has been set for 13 – 27 March 2017.
11.2 The Student Consultative Executive had approved the suggestion from the CEC to have student moderators on the online consultative forums and are investigating training and how they will be supported. 6 moderators will be recruited for this pilot which will be evaluated at a later date. Another change put by the CEC that was implemented this year, was the increase of student volunteers on the consultative forum from 100 to 200. This resulted in a considerable increase of new voices on the first topic of the term which is really positive to see.

11.3 The Deputy President raised the issue of the number of students showing an interest in attending but the limited number being able to attend the face to face meetings. She suggested that the Association should be capturing this interest and running its own consultations to assist and harness opinion and interest. The General Manager will pick this up with the Deputy President.

12. STUDENT SUPPORT POLICY

12.1 Deborah Peat, Head of the office of Director Student Support was in attendance to present the principles of the draft Student Support Policy.

12.2 Consultation has taken place over September 2016 with Academic Services Leadership Teams, Faculty leads, Student Support Teams (SSTs), Learning & Teaching Solutions (LTS) and Marketing who have had the opportunity to discuss and review the implementation of the draft Student Support Policy. Student input was now sought on the principles before the student consultation forum opened on 17 October for 2 weeks. The policy will then go to Senate in January 2017 approval.

12.3 The main points that the CEC fed back included:

- No inclusion of the Students Association. As an available support network, the Association should be mentioned in this policy.
- No mention of the social community and support available with non-academic issues.
- The wording used was so vague that it can encompass anything, everything and nothing. Plain English wording is needed.
- There was no mention of accessibility
- Tutor/student relationship principle be detailed higher in the set principles to reflect importance.
- High quality support staff are needed and training and development is essential for staff to be able to support students.
- Does ‘personalised support’ suggest 1-to-1 support that could raise student expectations above the achievable?

12.4 The CEC’s comments will be fed into the consultation.

13. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECT TEAM AND WORKSTREAMS

13.1 The Students Association has been working with the University on this joint engagement project for the past year. The project has 3 workstreams that focusses on various elements of student engagement in the shaping the curriculum and student experience.
13.2 The Deputy General Manager drew attention to the current student rep vacancies on the Project Team and each of the 3 workstreams and asked for any volunteers.

13.3 **RESOLUTION:** Volunteers for each group were:
- Project Team: Caroline Poppenga
- Work stream A: Barbara Tarling & Cinnomen McGuigan
- Work stream B: Cath Brown and Patricia Gray
- Work stream C: Steph Stubbins, Amelia Gackowska and Cinnomen McGuigan

13.4 **ACTION:** The Deputy General Manager will revisit student numbers on the workstreams with the OU to request an increase of representation and allow for reserves in the case of a student not being able to attend.

14. **REGIONS REVIEW UPDATE**

14.1 Some upset had been caused by this paper and a related communication previously circulated regarding the recommendation that all the Executives in the Nations and the previously proposed English Executive be discarded. Much debate had been had online about the proposal and the way that it had been announced which had continued with an honest and frank discussion at the previous evening of the CEC weekend. It was acknowledged that the language that had been used in the communication previously sent out to the Regional and National Executives had been incorrectly worded and apologies were given for the exclusion of the AARs in the discussions.

14.2 The Deputy General Manager ran through the details of the paper and gave an update from the working group meeting that had been held on 12 September. Progress had been made on the implementation of the review which included the launch of the Learning Experience Reporter (LER) role which was advertised during Freshers Week with 49 applicants interested to date. A Learning Experience Networking Zone (LENZ) is soon to be finalised which will be an area for the LERS, Faculty Association Reps (FARS) and Central Reps to communicate and share information with each other. LERS training packs will be created and online training will be given at the end of October. A temporary project lead will be recruited to fully implement all the changes of the review in due course.

14.3 The CEC discussed the recommendations with all opinions being heard. It was a fact that some regional Executives in England are more active than others and it is an ongoing task to generate enthusiasm and engagement in these regions. The elections were seen to be a barrier for students becoming involved so it was thought a model that takes out this layer of democracy would assist in engagement. Discussions around the roles of Assemblies have been ongoing for years and the rational to disband had been reached by the opinion that their functions were duplicated elsewhere therefore an alternative model of engagement would be better placed.

14.4 Other opinions thought otherwise, stating that local representation provided the visible side of the Association and many students start their journeys through the Association by joining their Assembly in the first instance. By removing this layer, it was thought the workload of AARs would increase and become unmanageable. It was agreed that
an appointment process may be a more attractive way to get students involved and a different name to ‘Executive Assemblies’ would be preferred but local on the ground representation and engagement should remain.

14.4 Lengthy discussions took place and it was agreed the project should be taken back to a working group for further consultation. The majority of the CEC did agree that the elections added an unnecessary level of democracy that could be removed but would leave to the working group to take more time to come up with alternative options.

14.5 **RESOLUTION:** The recommendations detailed in the paper were rejected. The elections due in November will not go ahead and as an interim measure, current National and Regional Assembly Executives will be invited to remain in their posts until firm proposals are available.

14.6 **ACTION:** The Working Group to reconvene with extended membership to include the AARs, and work towards developing proposals for a future CEC Meeting.

15. **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES** 10/16/15

15.1 VP Communications went through the paper advising that a new set of guidelines are needed and invited 5 members of the CEC to make up a working group to assist to develop these. The CEC discussed the 5 points regarding social media and how it should be used.

15.3 **RESOLUTION:** Working Group to consist of: Cath Brown, Sarah Couling, Anca Seaton, Steph Stubbins and Cinnomen McGuiggan.

15.4 **ACTION:** A draft set of guidelines to come back to the CEC in January 2017.

16. **UPDATES TO THE BYE LAWS** 10/16/16

16.1 VP Administration reported that reviewing the Bye-Laws was the first thing he did when coming into office in August this year. Suggested changes were tabled and comments were asked to be received online following the meeting. It was noted that no changes related to the Regions would be made until final decisions had been made with the Regions Review.

16.2 **ACTION:** Comments to be made online and VP Administration to present the changes to the Board of Trustees for approval.

17. **DIGITAL DIRECT DEMOCRACY** 10/16/17

17.1 The President had brought the proposal of Digital Direct Democracy to the CEC for discussion following promise of this in his election manifesto. He highlighted the Associations’ strapline of ‘Your Community, Your Voice’ and how we can build on that to create better inclusion for all. The current structure of the OU Students Association is a representative model but for students to really have their say, they need the ability to represent themselves. Digital Direct Democracy will introduce a mixed model of the current representative structure but also incorporating a democracy that will give those
students that want a say and a vote, the opportunity to do so. This should improve
greater student involvement and engagement going forward.

17.2 The OU have implemented Open Ideas, an online community for all OU staff, where
they can propose, promote and vote on new ideas that will drive the University
forward. Those ideas that reach a certain threshold level of votes are referred for
review and where appropriate implementation. The President has been exploring
being able to use this system for students with the OU’s Student Engagement Team. It
would be the intention that if a student idea reached a threshold, the CEC would
commit to exploring the idea further.

17.3 Members of the CEC generally agreed that encouraging students to get involved with
the Association is a positive step but further work on the details of the proposals are
needed.

17.4 RESOLUTION: The CEC approved the pilot study and to establish a working group to
explore the proposal further. Group to consist of: Chris Pane, Sarah Couling, Peter
Cowan, Steph Stubbins, Jamie Slater, Cath Brown, Caroline Poppenga and Rachel
Hughes.

18. STUDENT COMMUNITY TOOL 10/16/18

18.1 David McCann, Head of Digital Communications gave a brief background overview of
the project. The previous CEC had wanted a better community space to the VLE that
was not fit for purpose and had lost of a lot of the student community since its
implementation. The University had committed to provide an alternative tool which had
resulted in a proof of concept trial in March 2016 on the suitability Yammer. CEC
members had taken part in the trial although there was little interest in the system.

18.2 David queried whether there was still a need for a separate student community tool,
what this would look like and how other social media platforms that continue to grow,
fit in with this.

18.3 The CEC discussed the VLE, recognising that it was not as functional as it should be
however has advantages of the OU firewall and is a safe and moderated space that
social media will never be. It was thought that adding another social platform was not
the answer as this would spread students across more areas. Social media has grown
to be students first point of call and there is little point trying to move them to other
areas. The General Manager highlighted that the Online Student Experience
Programme had reported improvements to the VLE forums are incorporated within
OSEP and expressed an interest in getting student opinion with a view to looking at
what improvements can be made.

18.4 RESOLUTION: To withdraw from the project of Yammer and await to see what
happens with OSEP proposals in this area.

19. PLEXUS (LGBT+) 10/16/19

19.1 VP Administration informed the CEC that a group of students representing the LGBT+
community (Plexus) have approached the Association requesting to become an
Affiliated Society. This was not a straight forward request due to their appeal for
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restricted full membership which doesn’t follow the Bye-law that states societies should be open to all. Although mentioning an amendment could be an option, VP Administration suggested that Plexus become a Group which would allow them to be restrictive in their membership and operate under their own preferred terms, being as flexible in how informal or well-structured they choose. The paper proposed the same model as the DSG (Disabled Students Group) that has autonomy in how it is run with the privileges of support and elections run through the Association office as well as places at Conference and observer rights at the CEC.

19.2 The CEC were glad this had been brought to the meeting and advised how positive it was that this group were getting representation. They agreed that allowing Plexus their tiered membership was important that would see a full membership of those who define themselves as LGBT+ and then an additional level of associate membership that would be open to all students. There was a strong view for Plexus not to be put in the same category as the DSG due to the different levels of support needed. The DSG’s needs are so diverse, greater support is required from the CEC/office to help in ensuring they are fairly represented.

19.4 RESOLUTION: That Plexus be set up as a group on a probationary period to allow review of the situation in the future as the group develops. VP Administration and Head of Community to work with Plexus on the next steps.

20. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

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

21. ADAPTIVE ORGANISATION & CULTURE

21.1 Ella Overshot and Angella Hill-Wilson from Pecan Partnership ran a focus group on the objective from the University’s Students First Strategy that focused on creating an adaptive organisation and culture at the OU. Meetings and workshops had been held with many departments across the OU with this session focusing on the perspective from OU Students. Work will then be done with all departments to form a plan of how an improved approach can be taken to deliver this objective.

21.2 The CEC fed back their views on what the OU should do to develop a successful adaptive culture that will be included as part of the consultation. Pecan Partnership will keep students involved along the process and look to widen participation even further.

22. NEW VOLUNTEERS STEERING GROUP

22.1 ACTION: Recommendations of the membership on Steering Group to be made to Head of Volunteering and the Deputy President outside of the meeting.

23. GENERAL MANAGER’S BUSINESS

23.1 The Head of Operations highlighted the vacancy for a Director on the Board for the OU Students Shop. The role makes business decisions on stock and the general running
of the business. Anca Seaton and Cath Brown both put themselves forward for the position which will be passed to the Board of Directors to make the appointment.

23.3 The next episode of University Challenge featuring the OU Team will be aired 30 October 2016.

24. **PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS**

24.1 The President had invited the Vice Chancellor and Director Academic Services to address the concerns of the group about the poor implementation of the Group Tuition Policy. The full summary can be found on the [OU Students Association website](#).

24.2 The President thanked the CEC for a busy and informed weekend. He then went on to thank them for the amount of work and input that had been made by everyone over the first 2 months of their term.

25. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

12.1 None to report

26. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

26.1 It was confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be over the weekend of 27 – 29 January 2017.