The CEC is asked to:-

i) **receive** a report on progress

1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 At the CEC meeting in October, a number of recommendations were made by the Regions Review Working Group about the future of Nation Executives. The recommendations were rejected by the Committee and a new Working Group was set up to look at what structure should replace the English Executives and Assemblies and the future of Celtic Nation Executives and the Continental Europe Executive. Members agreed that those currently in elected local roles should remain in post until a way forward was decided on. The new working group and the related work was given the name of the Grassroots Project.

1.2 The Working Group is chaired jointly by the Deputy President and Vice President Community and includes Vice Presidents for Representation and Research, Education and Administration, the Faculty Association Representative for STEM, two Area Association Representatives from England and those from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Staff Members of the Group are Wendy Burrell, Jess Smith, Pooja Sinha, Kate Dungate, Beverley Woodbridge and Verity Robinson (see 1.3).

1.3 A temporary project lead has been employed to provide dedicated support to the Grassroots project and Verity Robinson took up this post in mid-December. Her role includes supporting the student Chairs, organising face-to-face and online meetings, facilitating and taking part in online discussions, capturing action points, gathering and dispensing relevant information to inform the work, doing desk research, keeping detailed project notes and records, providing project continuity ensuring the working group achieves project deadlines. The work will result in a recommendation for a future model of how the Student Association is structured and how its services are delivered in the four UK nations, the Republic of Ireland and Continental
Europe. The intention is for a recommendation to be presented to the Central Executive Committee at its meeting in late April 2017.

1.4 The Project Lead will also be working with the Deputy General Manager to ensure that other recommendations from the Regions Review that took place in 2015 are successfully delivered and that the recent new initiatives (referred to from 3 below) become business as usual.

2. GRASSROOTS PROJECT

2.1 Following her induction, and after early discussion with the Deputy President and VP Community to discuss the background to the project, the Project Lead has been collecting, collating and analysing the data available, along with collecting new information. A number of discussions have already taken place within the Working Group around the current structure, what motivated the representatives in the Working Group to volunteer with the Students Association, what platforms we can use to communicate with students and survey questions to put to them.

2.2 A Student Survey addressing Student Community will be released to all students during week commencing 23rd January. A separate survey for HLM's to the same effect will be sent out soon after. The survey will close on the 27th February when there will be a prize draw for students who participate.

2.3 A Skype meeting between the Deputy President, Vice President Student Community, the Project Lead and the Deputy General Manager took place on 19th January in order to talk about some early concerns from Group members, to look at progress to date and to discuss the Group's terms of reference. Notes from this meeting will be published on the Working Group Forum shortly to get agreement from the team on the way forward.

2.4 A face to face meeting of the Working Group is planned for 28th January.

2.5 The details below contain updated information on recent initiatives that arose from the Regions Review.

3 LEARNING EXPERIENCE REPORTERS

3.1 Learning Experience Reporters (LERs), the new volunteer opportunity for students interested in amplifying the student representative voice, are up and running. The role was first advertised during Freshers Week in October 2016 with a big promotional push to all interested students across social media, with an article on the Students Association website and a slot on the OU Students Radio.

3.2 Current LERs have begun their task of being the eyes and ears of the Association, with 61 signed up so far. Conversations have been started in the Learning Experience Networking Zone (LENZ), where a number of issues are being addressed. (More info about LENZ below).

3.3 Students sign up via a link to an online form, giving a few sentences as to why they would like to be a Learning Experience Reporter. Some of these reasons have been inspiring, and will be used in future publicity.
3.4 LERs were invited to take part in an online training session held in OU Live. They have all been provided with a set of guidelines in the form of a ‘How To’ document, a volunteer handbook, a link to the Lenz and a link to a recording of the training session, as well as the slides from the training.

3.5 There is ongoing work to promote this new role with regular new applications being received. Preparations are being made for a Face to Face training event for these volunteers during Student Voice Week (11-17 March).

4. THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE NETWORKING ZONE (LENZ)

4.1 A new suite of forums has been created in the Student Association private area and is known as the Learning Experience Networking Zone (LENZ). This consists of 19 forums, one for each new Board of Study (BoS). (Boards of Study oversee modules and qualifications within a certain area of responsibility. For example, the Faculty of Business and Law has three BoS, these are Law, Undergraduate Business and Masters.) In the forums, LERs from that BoS communicate with relevant Faculty Association Reps, Central Reps and Officers.

4.2 A breakdown of LER numbers by Faculty are as follows:

- FASS: 23
- FBL: 7
- STEM: 23
- WELS: 10
- LTI: 6

This is slightly more than the total number of LERs as a few students are in more than one faculty.

4.3 The first newsletter has been sent on behalf of the FARs and included some introductory questions with the FARs to enable students to get to know them better. There was also a quiz which gave the LERs some context for their role and some specific guidance.

5. LOCAL COMMUNITIES

5.1 The Local Communities project continues to move forward positively. All meet-up hosts have now received their support packs, and meet-ups continue to be promoted and held regularly. From 1st November 2016 to date (9th January 2017) 26 meet-ups have been recorded. This includes 3 online meet-ups (two for European Students, and one on Christmas Day). Numbers participating in meet-ups vary but at present average at around 5 students per meet up.

5.2 Plans for “The Big Feb Meet Up” are well underway, and meet-up organisers everywhere are being encouraged to host a simultaneous meet-up on Saturday 25th February 2017. More information can be found here.

6. GROUPS, SOCIETIES & CLUBS

6.1 Early discussions about the concept of “clubs” have taken place with Vice President Community, Vice President Administration and the Societies Committee Chair. Along with Head of Student Community and the
aforementioned student representatives, our new Projects Officer (Community) will be working to define “clubs” – how they differ from a societies and groups, what the right level of support will be, and how they will work in practice. A pilot project is being planned to take place during 2017.

6.2 The Societies Committee met in November and continues to work very well. There are now 23 Societies affiliated to the Association, with a further 2 very close to affiliation. We anticipate that Plexus (the LGBT+) group will become formally affiliated very soon, and they continue to work very hard to raise the profile of the group, and build student community.

7. VOLUNTEERING

7.1 The Head of Volunteering has begun work with teams trying to provide some consistency around our volunteering opportunities. Where possible the aim is to be consistent around our approach to volunteer recruitment, support, training and reward. This recently included supporting the training and induction offered to the new LERs and working with the Digital Communications team to firm up the Radio Host role ready to recruit more volunteers in 2017. During this time there has also been an audit of volunteers. We currently have 352 individual volunteers (with number being much higher as many students take on more than one role!).

7.2 A second member of staff has now been recruited to this new team and Nicola Powell joined us as Student Volunteer Officer at the beginning of January. The increase to this team allows us to do more work with Honorary Life Members and offer better support to current volunteers, including creating a volunteers’ newsletter and work to source a new volunteer management system that help us to look after and communicate with our students more easily.

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Head of Student Community

Verity Robinson
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