Minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) held over the weekend of 21 – 23 April 2017 at Kent’s Hill Training Centre in Milton Keynes MK7 6BZ

PRESENT
Lorraine Adams – VP Education
Cath Brown – Faculty Association Representative Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
Peter Cowan – VP Administration
Sarah Couling – Area Association Representative England
Victoria Crawford – Area Association Representative England
Cherry Day – VP Equal Opportunities
Patricia Gray – Area Association Representative Scotland
Rachel Hughes – VP Communications
Alison Kingan - VP Student Support
Cinnomen McGuigan – Area Association Representative Northern Ireland
Anca Seaton – Area Association Representative England
Nicci Simpson – Acting President (Chair)
Claire Smith – Area Association Representative Wales
Steph Stubbins – VP Community
Barbara Tarling – OU Council Member
Jan Thompson – Faculty Association Representative Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies

IN ATTENDANCE
Rob Avann – General Manager
Wendy Burrell – Deputy General Manager
Andy Cooke – Observer, Board of Trustees
Richard Duffy – Observer, England
Kate Dungate – Head of Student Community (part)
Magda Hadrys – Head of Operations (part)
Sally Kitchingman – Head of Resources
Shara McDonald – Observer, England
Beth Metcalf – Head of Volunteering (part)
Natalie Pope – Observer, Disabled Students Group
Nicola Powell – Student Volunteer Officer (part)
Leanne Quainton – Executive Assistant (minutes)
Verity Robinson – Grassroots Projects Lead (part)
Pooja Sinha – Research & Information Officer
Richard Shortland – Observer, England
Marli Smith – Observer, England
Jill Tupper – Observer, England
German Yanez Marquez – Observer, Scotland
INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

A. PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

The Acting President welcomed everyone to the meeting.

B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Amelia Gackowska – Area Association Representative Continental Europe
Chris Pane - President
Caroline Poppenga – VP Representation and Research

C. MINUTES

C.1 The Minutes (CEC 1/17/M) from the January 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 4/17/1

2. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES CEC 4/17/2

3. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES CEC 4/17/3

4. RECEIVED: REPORTS OF THE OFFICERS & OU STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBER CEC 4/17/4

4.1 The OU Council Member added to her report to advise that the CEC’s suggestions of greater engagement with the University’s Council would be taken to the Governance and Nominations Committee for consideration. She highlighted that due to Council attempting to reduce its numbers of those in attendance, CEC members will not be able to observe Council meetings however the other suggestions had been supported.

4.2 VP Student Support reported that the Peer Supporters email address is now available on the OU Students Association website.
5. RECEIVED: FINANCE REPORT

5.1 The absence of a management charge in this year's accounts for OSL (OUSA Services Limited) was queried. It was clarified that this was because of the change in exam papers becoming free of charge to students. The OU have agreed to cover the loss of income over the next 5 years and for this year have transferred the amount due to OSL to the Association, therefore the Association decided to forgo the management charge for this year and pay the company the difference.

5.2 Two other queries were raised over the budget for observers at CEC meetings and the use of discretionary spend. Observers at CEC meetings are currently being reviewed and will have a separate line on the budget accounts in future years. It was clarified that the discretionary spending code was money allocated to the Trustees to award to projects which had bid for funding. This year for these funds have included Student Voice Week and a Society event in the summer.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

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 20 February 2017 and the minutes can be found on the OU Students Association website.

6.2 The General Manager highlighted that there will be a detailed update on the Incorporation process at a future CEC meeting. Interviews for an external consultant to act as the project manager had been held on 21 April and the successful candidate will be starting the work in the coming weeks.

6.3 Discussions continue with the university over the subvention allocation for 2017/18 and we are awaiting the decision of the date that the proposal will go to the VCE (Vice Chancellors Executive) for final approval. It is thought there will be marginal growth in the funding for 2017-18 however negotiations for the next three years continue as we push for some security in funding for the future.

6.4 The General Manager confirmed that work will start on recruitment for the vacant position of Head of Digital Communications in the coming weeks.

7. STUDENT CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

7.1 The last of the spring Regional Consultation Meetings had taken place in Edinburgh on 22 April and the general feeling was that they had worked well with greater attendance and participation. The next Student Consultative Executive Meeting will take place on 24 April where they will be reviewing the spring meetings and looking ahead to the autumn schedule.
7.2 Attendance had improved on previous years and a more realistic expectation of dropouts had been accommodated although on average attendance had been 18-20 students, only 25% of those invited.

7.3 Feedback had been received around having no space on the agenda for attendees to raise any of their own issues with OU staff. It was clarified that this had been trialled in past years but it was felt that it didn’t work. In the planning of the meetings topics were set from student feedback so it is hoped that these topics cover some of the key student concerns.

7.4 It was hoped that feedback from the OU will be available earlier than in previous years and the CEC will be involved in the write up of the final report. The Association staff team will be evaluating the students Association part of the meeting on 24 April when it was thought that feedback would be available.

8. GRASSROOTS PROJECT

8.1 The Grassroots Project Lead, Verity Robinson presented the recommendations made by the Working Group on the future direction of the regions and nations. The summarised recommendations were:

   a) To implement a new Student Community volunteer position ‘Community Volunteers’.
   b) Implement ‘Meet Your Students Association’ gatherings across the UK and Ireland where students have the opportunity to meet with members of the CEC and other students.
   c) A further review of external engagement opportunities in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and a new volunteer role to assist with external affairs and higher education policy issues in these areas.

8.2 The CEC welcomed the proposals and were pleased that the current system had been refreshed. Properly defining roles would enable students who want to get involved with the Association to have the guidance and support that they need.

8.3 A comment was raised regarding the gap that remains for external engagement for England. This area currently sits in the Presidents remit although is a huge area and creating those links with government is invaluable and needs to be built upon.

8.4 A request for faculty based meet-ups as well as geographically based was made.

8.5 Verity highlighted that all changes would be reviewed and can be tweaked along the way and thanked the Working Group for their efforts in this important piece of work.

8.6 RESOLUTION: The recommendations were approved.

9. UPDATES FROM THE VOLUNTEERS TEAM

9.1 Head of Student Volunteering, Beth Metcalf introduced the paper, asking the CEC how they would like to receive updates from the Volunteers Steering Group without the Volunteering Team having a linked Officer to feed information through. VP
Administration highlighted the remits review that will be taking place in the run-up to Conference 2018 that will look at Officer roles and whether the current numbers and remit areas are correct. A suggestion of a new Forum to receive feedback was made. The team will take back to discuss further.

9.2 The idea of community volunteering opportunities was discussed as something offered by other universities, which would be a way of bringing students together on one-off projects, big and small across the UK and the nations. The idea received mixed views from the CEC with a concern that it might not be well supported for the considerable resource that would be required to organise due to the many other commitments OU students have. There was agreement that the Association should be joining in with the large national days which are good ways of getting involved, without the resource. A suggestion was also made about skills sharing and students being able to offer a service to other students. Partnerships with other organisations that already facilitate this type of service would be investigated and further suggestions brought forward in due course.

10. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVES

10.1 Natalie Read, Student Engagement Manager in Academic Services at the OU was in attendance to present on the joint OU/Association student engagement project.

10.2 Natalie highlighted the 5 pilot initiatives:

a) Student Ideas: A campaign to crowd source student ideas that improve, support or enhance student experience. Students are asked to submit ideas and other students then vote and comment on proposals. If it reaches an allocated amount of votes, ideas are escalated to the university’s Learning and Teaching Innovation Group who will consider feasibility and then pass to the relevant faculty/body who will look at implementation. The pilot will be launched in July 2017 with 2,500 students with an evaluation held after 6 months. The CEC emphasised the importance of ensuring departments are accountable for implementing ideas and asked for continued response and feedback from those responsible on the progress with individual projects.

b) Student Partnerships: Groups of students or student/staff teams can apply for up to 15 days of paid work to complete a project. It must have a focus of enhancing student experience or engagement and students will be matched up with the relevant OU staff members to implement. A comment was received regarding those students on benefits where a payment would affect their claim - Natalie responded that she would look into different methods of compensation so as not to disincentivize these students. CEC members asked for it to be made clear on all communications that students don’t need project planning experience to bid for funds, just a good idea.

c) Student Shadowing: Students will be given the opportunity to shadow a member of OU staff for anything from half a day up to 5 days. All expenses will be paid and the nations will be actively involved. Part of the project will be for the student to write up an article afterwards about their experience.

d) Graduate Internships: Open to OU students that are about to graduate or have graduated in the last three years to have a paid internship for up to 12 months. There would be around six spaces available and it is intended for students who have had barriers in getting into employment that would benefit from the scheme. Units will need
to bid for places, making a case as to why they require an intern. Options for remote working will also be made available. The CEC will see the criteria prior to finalisation.

e) Student Voice Website: The website will be implemented for Freshers Week in September, accessed on Student Home under ‘Community’ and will have a number of ‘You Said, We Did’ features, student opportunities and useful links.

10.3 It was confirmed that a number of CEC members sit on the pilot working groups so further comments and feedback could be fed in through these channels.

11. **ELECTIONS REVIEW**

11.1 Following analysis from a survey carried out in January 2017 that asked for feedback on the elections process from both students that had voted in the 2016 elections and from those that had been candidates, the Working Group had made a number of recommendations to improve the process for 2018.

11.2 A lengthy discussion was had around the proposed recommendations with a vote made on each.

11.3 **RESOLUTION:**

a) Introduce the Association alongside the election announcement to increase engagement and explain the impact it has. **APPROVED**

b) Election period shortened to four to six weeks. **APPROVED**

c) Election process to take place in April/May. **APPROVED**

d) Two types of role descriptions; one at-a-glance and one detailed to explain the role. **APPROVED**

e) A flowchart giving an overview of the democratic structure of the Students Association. **APPROVED**

f) No changes to the nominations process. **APPROVED**

g) A manifesto structure with standard questions for all candidates as well as the individual submission as previously. **APPROVED**

h) Candidates can stand for no more than two CEC roles and must submit different manifestos. **APPROVED**

i) Campaigning rules to be accompanied by campaigning guidelines in order to aid candidates with the process and to ensure fairness. **APPROVED**

j) A stop on campaigning once voting starts to be included in the election rules. **REJECTED**

k) Two types of hustings: live hustings and a Q&A style forum on the VLE with appropriate moderation. **Live Hustings as a concept was approved but a more specific recommendation was requested about the detail of how this will work.**

l) Exploration of other channels to distribute podcasts/transcripts of hustings to engage with those students less active on the VLE. **More clarity and a more specific recommendation required.**

11.4 **ACTION:** VP Representation & Research to convene the Working Group to come up with more detail on these matters. The Working Group to continue to work on the implementation of these actions.
12. INTERNAL CEC COMMUNICATION ‘ROUND ROBIN’ CEC 4/17/12

12.1 VP Communications reported that a Working Group had been scoping the concept of an internal CEC communication between members. The paper detailed guidelines and content deadlines for the communication that will be circulated monthly. The communication will be piloted for the next 2 months and then effectiveness will be evaluated.

13. FORUM GUIDELINES REVIEW CEC 4/17/13

13.1 VP Administration presented the updated Comprehensive Guide to the OUSA Forum Service that had been reviewed with CAP (Controller Advisory Panel), Forum Moderators and the Operations Team in the office. The review brings the guidelines up to date and covers the general principles and management of the Forum. A broader review will follow that will look at the Association’s Forum structure (paper 4/17/15) and also the Complaints and Disciplinary procedures. Once approved the composition and disciplinary powers of CAP will be then reviewed.

13.2 ACTION: The CEC commented on the guidelines and VP Administration will incorporate the changes.

14. OUSA MATTERS REDEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP CEC 4/17/14

14.1 It had been agreed at the last CEC meeting that OUSA Matters would be developed into a new forum. The paper detailed a proposal for the creation of a ‘Talk to your Students Association’ Forum to replace OUSA Matters.

14.2 The CEC commented on the proposal and the expectations detailed in the paper with a number of changes being made. Duplicating work was raised with the proposed threads for News and CEC papers that are already on the website which is where students should be signposted to. The expectation of CEC members visiting once a week should also be reworded as no other forum space has this expectation.

14.3 Members agreed that this is a chance to change the nature of this forum and make it a place for students to come, discuss and question Association matters in a comfortable environment.

14.4 RESOLUTION: With the changes discussed, the new forum space, name and structure was approved.

15. VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FORUM RESTRUCTURAL CEC 4/17/15 REVIEW

15.1 VP Communications introduced a proposal to update the current VLE suite of student forums. She advised that with over 400, many are not being used therefore a full restructure to make them more accessible and less cluttered is hoped to encourage more students to use them and to provide a space that mirrors the social media, email and website communications.
15.2 **RESOLUTION & ACTION:** It was agreed that one Working Group be set up rather than the individual ones detailed in the paper that will look at the structure as a whole for a more holistic approach. The Working Group to consist of: VP Communications, VP Community, VP Equal Opportunities, VP Administration, AAR Northern Ireland, AAR England (Anca Seaton) with some Moderators asked to join. Proposals will be brought back to the next CEC Meeting.

16. **CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW**

16.1 VP Administration highlighted the two reviews to take place in the lead up to Conference 2018; The remits review and the Constitutional review. The Rules Revision weekend is scheduled for November 2017 and it is hoped that a consultation period from September–October 2017 is held online prior to enable the student body to have their say and feed into the weekend. VP Administration asked the CEC to reflect upon their roles and responsibilities and return their thoughts on the questions provided in the paper for a more detailed discussion on the remits review at the July 2017 CEC. A complete overhaul of the remits and roles could be made if necessary and starting to look at them early, allows planning in plenty of time before Conference 2018.

16.2 **ACTION:** All CEC members to provide their answers to VP Administration by end June 2017.

17. **RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

17.1 The Research and Information Officer, Pooja Sinha introduced the paper on behalf of Caroline Poppenga, VP Representation and Research giving some background context as to why the Get Engaged Survey had been revisited and identified the two research topics.

17.2 The Get Engaged Survey, ran by the Association in 2014 had highlighted effective representation to the university as the second priority area for students (after supporting each other with study), and had also flagged up that only 25% of respondents thought that they could get their voice heard effectively. At a time when work through student voice is being developed, the pool of volunteers with the introduction of FARs and LERS has expanded, it was felt a good time to take stock of the Association’s efforts and whether student satisfaction in this area has improved.

17.3 The first topic, therefore, would revisit a lot of these priority areas which would also be relevant as students graduate on the new qualification pathways, have a new tuition policy, deal with changing fees and loan arrangement, and with regional centres being closed. The second topic would look at understanding how and why students volunteer with the Association which will look at the demographics, motivations and any barriers to volunteering.

17.4 The CEC were pleased that the research would focus on academic representation issues as the academic interests of students and how we represent them to the OU is a key area. There were suggestions to explore policy decisions (such as OU Redesign), however these developments are still ongoing, with new ones being
introduced frequently, so a balance between current policy concerns and more long term objectives of developing benchmarks for the Association’s representation work will need to be found.

17.3 **ACTION:** Pooja will post further information online to continue discussions to ensure the correct approach in the piece of research.

18. **HONORARY LIFE MEMBER ENGAGEMENT**

18.1 Honorary Life Membership (HLMs) are awarded to students in recognition of service to the Association. Currently they receive a certificate but no other benefit is given. Research from other universities showed variation in the awards given to HLMs and a survey completed by 43 of our 162 HLMs showed them feeling undervalued and not communicated with. Student Volunteering Officer, Nicola Powell proposed some recommendations to enhance the Association’s Honorary Life Membership which included an annual bespoke HLM newsletter, their names published in a new Roll of Honour feature on the website and a certificate and pin commemorating their membership.

18.2 The CEC welcomed these proposals and liked the idea of an opportunity to include them in an event with a further suggestion of doing something around the 50th anniversary of the OU.

18.3 **RESOLUTION:** The recommendations were approved.

19. **OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION STRATEGY WORKSHOP**

19.1 Anna Barber, Head of Strategic Planning in the OU’s Strategy & Information Office ran a workshop reviewing the current OU Students Association Strategy’s objectives.

19.2 **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

20. **NOTED:** BYE-ELECTIONS

21. **RECEIVED:** WEBSITE REDEVELOPMENT

22. **GENERAL MANAGER’S BUSINESS**

22.1 None recorded.

23. **PRESIDENT’S BUSINESS**

23.1 The Acting President thanked the CEC for their support over the last couple of months as she had taken on an increased workload in the President’s absence.
23.2 The Acting President reminded the CEC that at this time next year, the Association will be in the midst of elections so encouraged all to think about their own goals, any personal development and any projects they want to achieve and to get the most out of this experience over the next 12 months.

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

23.1 None recorded.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

29.1 It was confirmed that the date of the next meeting would be over the weekend of 14 – 16 July 2017 where events from the Training and Volunteering event would be included.