OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

Central Executive Committee (CEC)
21 – 23 April 2017

AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES (AARs) REPORTS

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:-

AARs for England
AAR for Wales
AAR for Scotland
AAR for Northern Ireland
AAR for Continental Europe
English Assemblies

Anca Seaton: I must start this report by apologising for the small amount of activities/meetings/involvement due to ongoing health issues. I am hoping this is a temporary situation and normal duties will resume as soon as possible.

Things are ticking over in the English assemblies. Due to the temporary extension of the Assembly Executive posts, they are really quiet and somehow in limbo. The Executives are keeping things going, mostly on social media and also with meet-ups, with the help of volunteers. A special mention goes to East Midlands, where the team is very active and posting on the VLE as well.

Social Media & Online Activity

Sarah Couling: My Colleagues, Anca, Victoria and I decided that we would like to have a Facebook page. Anca Proactively contacted the Coms team to create our banner and this has now been added to our page. We have taken the first steps in the page creation, but have yet to complete the page. This is something that I have been working on, albeit with the necessary nagging from my team mates. We would like to “launch” our Facebook page via email to the members, but the main issue is that we would not want to exclude members that are not actively on Facebook and therefore the wording of this email would need to thought out carefully. Still a work in progress.

There have been multiple online events over the past few months. I have not been able to attend all, however I was lucky enough to attend the online events on the OU Big Meet up. I will discuss this in another section of my report.

I have found that the use of Instagram and Facebook for photos has been invaluable for gaining student attention. With the use of the hashtags #OUstudents and #MeetOUstudents, I have noticed and increase in friend requests. Therefore, proving that these hashtags are working to bring students together as well as promoting the association, all I must do is remember to use them.

Victoria Crawford: On the OU Forums I am reading all posts and commenting where appropriate. I am a member of the Grassroots Working Group, the Matters Working Group and the Round Robin Working Group and taking part in the discussions there. On Facebook I am reading posts on regional groups and commenting when I can help.

On twitter I tweeted all of our January Freshers events and continued to follow anyone #new2OU. I continue to have regular chats with OU students regarding their concerns. I regularly signpost students to places they can receive the assistance they need, such as, OU Careers Service, Peer Support, the events calendar, OU Shop,
Nightline, volunteering opportunities, OU Library tutorials, OU access courses, etc. I also found two observers for the April CEC.

Anca Seaton: Due to the changes in the Social Media Guidelines, most of the regional Facebook groups are now closed groups. This should encourage students to talk and be more open, without the fear of their posts appearing all over theirs and their friends’ walls.

**Grassroots Project Group**

Anca Seaton: Discussions are continuing in the Grassroots Working Group, with the aim to have the paper presented at this meeting. My contribution was somehow limited due to ongoing health issues.

Sarah Couling: Unfortunately, due to lack of time I have been unable to participate in the online working group. Furthermore, there was a skype meeting that took place recently, that I was also unable to attend. I do feel that I would have been able to contribute to these meetings and will actively make time to pop into the online forums going forward.

**Social Meetings and Activities – Big February Meet-Up**

Anca Seaton: I organised my very first meet-up in Nuneaton on 25th February, which was part of The Big February Meet-Up. The event went really well, although I did not have a big number of attendees. The support pack was a welcome addition to the event and I am happy to report that one of the attendees is a returning student who is starting an access course in the autumn. They came to the meet-up with the family, which was a wonderful thought. We should encourage students to bring family and friends, where possible and doable, this way we are showing we are a community and support our students in more ways than one.

Sarah Couling: The big meet up was, in my opinion a massive success. I hosted a meet up in Bristol, near Bristol Temple Meads. It was in a real live Yurt! Unfortunately, though, turn out in Bristol was low and ended up just being two wonderful students other than me and my partner (also an OU Student, and how we met). Later in the evening I joined in with the OU live online events. They were very good and I enjoyed it. It was however mostly CEC members. There was a lot of activity online and with the OU Students Association hashtags. I loved that even people online could join in if they were unable to attend a live event.

**Meets ups held since last CEC and scheduled**

London
Nottingham
Darlington
Norwich
Maidstone
Wakefield & Barnsley OU Students Big Feb Meet Up
Canterbury OU Students Big Feb Meet Up
Bristol OU Students Big Feb Meet Up
Newbury OU Students Big Feb Meet Up
Peterborough OU Students Big Feb Meet Up
Student Consultative Forum

Sarah Couling: I attended my first student consultative forum on the 4th March in Exeter. The two chosen topics were “building the student community” and “Educational and Pastoral Support”. I felt that these topics were great choices and I was excited to take part. I enjoyed the day and it was well attended. I found that there was such a varied idea of what the needs of the students are and that it tended to go off topic towards recent events and complaints.

The OU Students Association session was really great albeit it did seem that there was mild tension towards us as to why things have not been changed within the OU regarding certain issues. But the two staff members as well as Nicci were a great asset to the association.

Working Groups

Sarah Couling: I was very lucky to attend a Workshop on the new website with VP Community and OU Student Association staff. Unfortunately, the new student that was due to attend, could not make it.

The workshop was very informative and I felt that the best choice was made taking into account what the students want, what we need and what is best all-around, as well as remaining within a competitive price. Really enjoyed taking part in this important aspect of behind the scenes work. I also really enjoyed my personalised tour of the campus by the lovely Steph (VP Community).

Meetings and Events since the last Meeting

Victoria Crawford

23 January 2017  Welcome to the OU Students Association, Facebook online event where I answered student enquiries.

25 January 2017  Meet OU Students in your Area, I answered questions and chatted to students.

26 January 2017  Get involved in your Students Association, I spoke to students about volunteering opportunities.

16 February 2017  OU Student Community have your say, chatting to students.
22 February 2017  O U Students Volunteering Chat! I spoke to students about volunteering opportunities.

25 February  Big Meet Up, chatted to students on O U Live.
15 March  Grassroots online chat, talking to students about their expectations for the O U community.
25 March  Student Consultation, Manchester. Attended with other students and spoke about the O U Students Association and gathered feedback from the day.

Anca Seaton: 25th January, 2017 – Meet OU Students In Your Area – I attended the Facebook chat aimed at new students (and not only). It was well attended and, together with the hosts and other elected representatives, talked to students about how to meet other students in their area, pointed them to their regional group(s) and encouraged them to attend and organise meet-ups in their area.

30th January, 2017 – Visit to SRSC (Student Recruitment and Support Centre), OU Campus, Milton Keynes, together with Alison Kingan, Vice President Student Support and Kate Dungate from the Students Association office. It was a great opportunity to meet with the SRSC for FBL and FASS, listen to presentations by OU staff and do a tour of both centres. The visit highlighted the willingness of both parties (SRSCs, on one hand, and the Student Association, on the other hand) to work together closely for the benefit of students. Special thanks to Alison for her guidance and support.

25th February, 2017 – The Big February Meet-Up – Face to Face event organised in Nuneaton (Warwickshire) and participation in the online (both Facebook and OU Live) event.

15th March, 2017 – Grassroots Chat – Part of the Student Voice Week, I attended this chat and talked to students about regional assemblies, volunteering and generally, the OU Students Association

Future Meetings

Sarah Couling: I have another Bristol meet up planned for the near future and have been actively trying to promote evolvement in committees. I shall be attending Campus in Milton Keynes on Saturday the 8th April for the Committee AGM. I am looking forward to the next few months and the outcome of the bye elections.

Anca Seaton:
5th-7th May, 2017 – Science Revision Weekend. The Students Association will have a stand at this event. The aim is to raise awareness and raise money for The Open University Students Education Trust by selling OU-branded merchandise which normally is only available through our website and major face to face events.

My health continues to be an issue and I cannot really commit to face to face meetings and events at this stage. I am sure this situation will change and normal duties will be resumed soon.

Sarah Couling, Victoria Crawford, Anca Seaton
Area Association Representations England
This is a report about my activities as the Area Association Representative (A A R) for Wales. In this role, I am responsible for representing and reporting upon the views of students living in Wales to the C E C and informing the C E C about Association Activities within Wales.

Wales Assembly Executive and Members

There is currently 1 Assembly Executive and 6 Assembly Members in Wales who have been elected to represent the Association at a local level. I keep them informed of my activity via email and our forums. While the grassroots project is ongoing activity there has been little contact from the Assembly although I some members have previously told me that they are interested in being kept informed of the recommendations that emerge from the project.

Social Meeting and Activities

There were two meet-ups in Wales as part of the Big OU Student Meet-up on 25 February. One in Cardiff and one in Swansea. It was the first meet-up to be organised by a student in Swansea and they plan to do another in the future having obtained a host's pack from the office. I am also planning to host the next Cardiff meet-up after Easter before students are too absorbed in studying for E M As and exams.

Social Media

The social media accounts continue to grow with 533 twitter followers and 432 Facebook members. I have also set up a page for my role which has 41 likes and I am slowly getting used to maintaining and updating this page so hope to gain more likes as time goes on.

OU in Wales student meeting with Welsh Government, Cabinet Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams A M

I was one of several students invited to meet Kirsty Williams A M when she visited the OU in Wales on 12 January. She was very interested in how we came to be studying at the OU and said she was hopeful for the implementation of the recommendations from the review of Higher Education funding that will offer support to part-time students which is equal to that which full-time students enjoy.
Consultation response to student support and funding recommendations in Wales

I submitted a response to the Welsh Government’s consultation on student support and funding recommendations in Wales which closed on 14 February 2017. I am grateful for support from Michelle Matheron, Policy and Public Affairs Manager at the OU in Wales whose input was invaluable in helping me to put a response together. I would be happy to share the response with anyone who wishes to read it as it has not yet been published on Welsh Government’s website.

Prior to compiling the response, I also met with NUS Wales who were interested to know what the Association felt was important for part-time students. One of the things that I highlighted was the positive of keeping a downward pressure on fees for part-time students as well as the availability of grants to help with living costs.

OU Student Consultative Meeting at OU in Wales, Cardiff

Approximately 15 students attended the Consultative Meeting in Cardiff where there was a lot of positive discussion on both topics and interest in what the Association does. A number of things stood out including:

- Support for a personal tutor/mentor type role but concern over whether it would dilute resources elsewhere as the provision of this for everyone would be a huge undertaking for the OU;
- Face to face tutorials are important to the students and there was frustration over being allocated to tutorials outside of their area and missing out on attending tutorials with their own tutors.
- There was a lack of awareness over opportunities to volunteer for the Association and a perception that everything happens in Milton Keynes.
- Students enjoyed the meeting and would like to do something similar more often.

Summary of other activities

In addition to the highlights above below is a summary of other activities undertaken as part of my role:

- As a member of two CEC working groups for the Grassroots project and the Elections Review, I have contributed to forums and attended online meetings.
- Meeting with Simon Horrocks, Assistant Director at OU in Wales where I have discussed attending Higher Education Academy events coming up in May and a joint email to encourage responses to the National Student Survey with the OU in Wales Director.
- Attendance of a dinner as a guest of the OU Council who held their meeting in Cardiff last month.
- Contributed to online consultations on OU Social Media Guidelines.
- Communicated with the PLEXUS society who would like to meet at the OU in Wales this summer and have put them in touch with Simon Horrocks to make arrangements.
- Written a blog for the association’s website about my role to be published during the by-elections for the vacant CEC posts.
Activities since last CEC meeting

12 January  O U in Wales student meeting with Welsh Government Cabinet Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams at OU in Wales, Cardiff
19 January  Diamond Review consultation meeting with N U S Wales President at N U S Wales offices, Cardiff Bay
25 January  Senate Reference Group and O U Senate meeting at O U campus, Milton Keynes
25 February O U Students Big February meet-up at Café Nero, Cardiff
6 March  O U Council Dinner at Senedd, Cardiff Bay
21 March  Meeting with Simon Horrocks, Assistant Director (Development, Learning and Teaching) at O U in Wales, Cardiff
29 March  Online meeting of Election Review working group
1 April  O U Student Consultative Meeting at O U in Wales, Cardiff

Future commitments

4 April  Induction meeting with Sue Thomas, Working Secretary to Senate
5 April  Senate Reference Group and O U Senate meeting at O U campus, Milton Keynes
3 May  Higher Education Academy Employability Masterclass event, Cardiff
4 May  O U Charter day events at O U campus, Milton Keynes
12 May  H E F C W Student Opportunity and Achievement Committee meeting at H E F C W office, Caerphilly
24 May  WISE Wales Conference (Location T B C)

Claire Smith
Area Association Representative Wales
Central Executive Committee (CEC)
21 – 23 April 2017

REPORT OF THE AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (AAR) FOR SCOTLAND

Open University Students Association Scottish Assembly Meeting

Members of the Open University Students Association in Scotland held a Scottish Assembly meeting. There was a face to face meeting which was held in Edinburgh on 12th February 2017 in the booking office Edinburgh, and also an online meeting which ran from 5th Feb to 20th Feb 2017. Items on the agenda for discussion were Festival 2017. The Grassroots project and student engagement were also discussed.

SPARQS (Student Partnership in Quality Scotland) Annual Support Visit

This meeting with Simon Varwell was held in the OU office in Edinburgh. Among the items discussed were, Transitions activity, Faculty rep activity, PGT post graduate rep training and an online and distance learning project, this is a project that SPARQS run that I will become involved with working with Simon on in my role as Area Association Representative for Scotland.

Big Feb meet up

I hosted a coffee morning in the Seven Kings Bar/restaurant in Dunfermline on 25th February 2017 from 10.30am to 12 noon, as part of the Big Feb meet up. Five students attended this meet up, all were at various stages in their studies, and all were studying different subjects, we had a really good discussion, and suggestions for other meet ups were discussed future dates to be arranged.

SPARQS CONFERENCE

I attended the SPARQS Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland Conference on Thursday 23rd March, this conference was held in Edinburgh. This was a very well organized conference, I attended the keynote sessions and three workshops/presentations, the first was student engagement in gender action plans, the second was apprentice engagement- enhancing the apprentice learning experience, and the last one was student engagement in quality of transnational education.

Scottish Committee Meeting

This meeting is being held in the Edinburgh office on 22nd April, Mark Cameron is attending in my place and Matthew Walker and Ian Cheyne are also attending as I am in Milton Keynes for this CEC meeting. I will receive a report from them after the meeting.
What Appointments and meetings that I have attended since Jan 29th 2017

1 Feb  Scottish Working Committee meeting. This was held in the Open University office in Edinburgh.
6 Feb  Telephone interview with Karen Foley, we discussed the Students Association in Scotland, and our festival event we are planning for 30th September 2017
7 Feb  Meeting with SPARQS Student Partnership in Quality Scotland Annual Support Visit. This was held in the Open University office in Edinburgh.
12 Feb  Scottish Assembly meeting. This was a face to face meeting held in Edinburgh.
25 Feb  The Big Feb coffee morning meet up in Dunfermline.
2 March  SFC Scottish Funding Council Strategic Dialogue Meeting. This meeting was held in the Open University office in Edinburgh. It was attended by some students, and Representatives from the Scottish Funding council. Students were asked what made them chose the OU to study with, if it had affected their career, and what one thing they would like to see changed.

Future Appointments before the next CEC meeting in July.

4 May  Charter Day Milton Keynes
9/10 May QAA Conference in Nottingham
6/8 June QAA International Conference in Glasgow. Another Scottish Executive member is attending in my place on the 7th June because I have an exam that day.

Ongoing Meetings

Further planning for Festival of OU community life in Scotland, this will be online, and in the forums, and will be with other Scottish Executive members and with local students. The event is being held in Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, on Saturday 30th September. I have a few ideas for this event which are.

- I would like to invite some employers to have a table at this event, so students can find out about vacancies.
- Also I want to have as many societies with links in Scotland involved.
- Attendance from external agencies.
- And hold a meet your representative section.

So a lot of planning involved!

This concludes my report.

Patricia Gray
Area Association Representative for Scotland
Central Executive Committee (CEC)  
21 – 23 April 2017

REPORT OF THE AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (AAR) FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Assembly Executive

There have been no meetings of the Northern Ireland Assembly Executive since my last report. I remain in active contact with the other two members of the Northern Ireland Assembly via the VLE forums, social media and email. We have been discussing potential meeting dates, and also the prospect of co-opting a few people to the Assembly Exec in order to bolster the team.

Student Consultative Meetings

I will be attending the Student Consultation Meeting in Dublin on Saturday 8th April.

I attended the Strategy Workshop in Belfast on 15th March at the invitation of John D’Arcy, OU Director in Ireland. Was a great opportunity to speak to staff and tutors, and I was happy to be able to offer ‘proper student’ input to the discussion. These events really should have more student input, unfortunately I was the only non-staff member in attendance.

Social Meetings/Groups/Activities

There is a rolling student meet-up on the second Thursday of each month at the OU Belfast office. Local students are also encouraged and supported to organise student meet-ups, and there was one held in Ballymena as part of VP Community’s Big Feb Meet Up.

Social Media

The OUSA Northern Ireland Facebook page is growing with 391 members. I have a role specific Facebook page for the AAR Northern Ireland that is steadily growing, as is the Twitter account in the same name. I have 69 followers on Facebook and 258 on Twitter, where I engage with staff and students on a pretty much daily basis.

Social media continues to prove more popular than the regional VLE forums although I try to post regularly in the VLE and I do check in there most days. Most of my interaction with students currently comes via Twitter, Facebook or email.

Working Groups

I am active on a number of different working groups as part of my role and I engage with them as often as necessary.
Other Updates

No real headway has been made on the All Party Group for Students in Northern Ireland. The meeting I was intending to attend in January (from my last report) was cancelled/postponed due to the dissolution of the Irish Assembly and the current stalemate position we are in post-election until a government is formed. I have kept in touch with NUS:USI to be in a position to pick up with them once the Assembly here is sorted out.

Activities since last report

Throughout January: Various Facebook Live events for Fresher’s Week.
Throughout February: Various Facebook live events for Volunteering, Grassroots, Plexus, etc.
25 February: Big Meet Up Ballymena
16 March OU Belfast Strategy Workshop

Future Activities/Commitments/Dates for Diary

8 April Student Consultation Event, Dublin
14 – 16 July CEC Meeting

Cinnomen McGuigan
Area Association Representative for Northern Ireland
Central Executive Committee (CEC)
21 – 23 April 2017

REPORT OF THE AREA ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE (AAR) FOR CONTINENTAL EUROPE

Assembly Executives
I have has email contact with an assembly member from Northern Europe regarding the Grassroots Project, who recommends abolition of the assemblies and assembly executives due to the number of vacant positions in recent years. They would prefer to see the AAR (who they still refer to as SAR, suggesting a need for greater communication of the AAR role), gathering information in two directions: student feedback and experiences from social media groups, and from the university regarding news that will affect overseas students.

Social Activities and Social Media
Monthly OU Live chats have continued, despite low attendance and technical problems, and I continue to communicate relevant information via the VLE, Twitter and Facebook. Students have used private messaging to ask me questions regarding support, and country-specific issues, and I have signposted as appropriate. The Big Feb Meet-Up was popular amongst students in Continental Europe both on OU Live and on Facebook, but there were no attendees to a planned face to face meet up in Jena, Germany. I plan to organise another face to face event in Prague, Czech Republic, with further advanced notice, but currently have not set a date for this.

Consultative Meetings
The 2017 International Students' Consultation ran for a fortnight in March, during which students based out of the UK discussed the themes of student community and educational and pastoral support. With regards to the Student Association, comments were mixed, with positives including the atmosphere enjoyed at the 2016 Conference and the chance to meet other students through societies. Negative issues included a perspectives that CEC members are only interested in building their CVs, and a lack of information and sign posting for new students; many were frustrated to have only learned about the regional forums towards the end of their studies, and I have since spoken to the Students Association office regarding sending an introductory email.

Unfortunately there was confusion about what the Students Association is and what it does. For example, some participants thought that the university itself organises societies, and that the Association arranges tutorials. The OUSA acronym was used by many students as well as moderators. Posting as a representative, I offered some
clarification and am thinking further of how best to use information from the consultation in my role as AAR.

**Working Groups**

Since the last CEC meeting I have participated in two ongoing Students Association working groups: the Grassroots Project and the Round Robin project.

**Day School**

I attended one day of module L203’s residential school where I was able to give a short presentation to four out of five groups, distribute Association information, and chat with students during coffee breaks.

**Other Activities**

On behalf of an OU policy team I collected data from students regarding overseas degree recognition, and remain in touch with one of the university's researchers on this matter.

I gave permission for the OU communications team to use an article written for the Students Association magazine, regarding my experiences with studying and mental health, to be used in a response to a government paper.

**Attended Meetings**

- 27 January     Media Training
- 27 – 29 January CEC Meeting
- 3 February     Meeting with Verity Robinson, Grassroots Project Lead
- 8 February     Meeting with Stephanie Stubbins, VP Community
- 25 February    Big Meet-Up
- 3 March        L203 Residential School
- 17 March       Meeting with Amy King, Senior Business Manager, Academic Policy and Governance
- 23 March       Grassroots Project Meeting
- 27 March       International Students’ Consultation

*Amelia Gackowska*

*Area Association Representative for Continental Europe*