Please note CEC stands for Central Executive Committee

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Philippa Hi everyone thank you for tuning in today. Today I'm here with Cath Brown who’s one of the Faculty Association reps for the STEM Faculty. So Cath can you introduce yourself to the students and tell us a bit more about your role?

Cath Hi everyone. As Philippa says my name’s Cath Brown, I've been studying with the OU for quite a few years now, since 2008 and my role on the Student’s Association Central Executive is as the Faculty rep for STEM. Now people ask me what I do and to be honest a lot of it just seems to involve talking to people. I spend a lot of time talking to students, forums, social media, face to face. I obviously talk to my colleagues in the CEC, for example if a student raises an issues I'll often refer it on. I talk to our team of learning experience representatives who bring some of the issues they encounter, or good practice they encounter within the modules, our central committee reps. I talk to people in the Faculty, either giving feedback, making suggestions – sometimes I've even sourced student views from them. I talk to people in student support. I'm afraid sometimes that does involve saying, “Look one of the students have been at ((0:01:09?)) what are you going to do about it?” but they do say they really like me talking to them despite that.

Philippa Great okay so you've gone through some of the things that the role involves and you've mentioned that you're a member of the Central Executive Committee so what other things have you been able to get involved with as part of your role on the CEC that might not be role specific?

Cath It’s one of the nice things about being on the CEC there’s loads of things you can get involved in. I think some particular highlights for me have been being the student member on the group that was doing the academic review of the group tuition policy. I'm sure everyone remembers that group tuition policy that created all that chaos last year. So we’ve been looking at how far the policy was actually sound in itself. My personal view is that there were a few issues there, shall we say. So that's been an OU group that I've been working with. I've also been on the OU group that's been advising about the introduction of the online rooms, the new Adobe Connect package. I've been on a few workshops in connection with the Students First Transformation project. So that's been discussing things like the student experience, how we build an academic community. And coming up in March a couple of us have been invited to go to an event where we’re talking to people who are coming in as module chairs and we’ve been invited to talk about what makes a good
module chair. There's been quite a lot of other things as well because I always put my hand up.

Philippa And I think as well you do quite a lot of stuff outside of your elected role so do you want to talk a bit about them?

Cath Absolutely one of my other hats is I'm chair of the Societies Committee. Now that's the committee that representatives from all the student association affiliated societies come to. It's kind of partly a mutual support thing, we discuss ideas, we had a lovely societies event last summer. I came on to that because I'm involved in our Chemistry Society, Alchemy and our Physics Society, Fusion. I find that's another way to actually really get to know both people in the faculty and students, so obviously it's quite complementary to my role as the STEM Faculty rep.

Philippa Great okay thanks. So thinking back on your term so far, which shortly comes to an end, sadly, is there anything since your election that you've been involved with or that you've achieved that you’re particularly pleased with?

Cath I think one thing that really stands out, something that Lorraine the VP Education and I have managed to get together was there was a lot of concern from some students about what they regarded as a very unfair assessment strategy on one module and by making a bit of a fuss we actually got them to change it for the current presentation not just for future presentations. So that was definitely a bit of a highly. Something else that I'm pleased with that's happened recently is I went to a meeting together with Sam one of our office staff to Esteem which is the project within the STEM Faculty looking at how to improve the student experience. They do educational research. And following that meeting we've now got student representation on their advisory group. So I'm really pleased with that. But probably the thing that really gets to me personally a lot of the time is when an individual student says I've helped them and there really isn't anything to beat that, that is so lovely when someone says, “Look this has made a difference to me.”

Philippa Thanks. So thinking about your faculty at the minute, so STEM, and for any STEM students that are watching what do you think are the big issues for your students at the minute?

Cath Online delivery is always, always a big one. STEM were pioneers in this, one of our predecessors on the CEC used to refer to them as the faculty of book-burners which was a little unfair but they did start out with the online delivery and that is something that a lot of people are concerned about. Another issue that comes up is the issue or whether the tutorials are records and in some
modules lots of them are, in others very few are and the students aren’t very happy about that they do find the recordings very useful. For some science students lab experience is quite a big issue as well and I think everyone is always concerned about keeping a decent choice of modules as everyone feels they study so much better if they can actually study something they want to do.

Philippa Okay. And then looking forward we’ve got a conference coming up here in June on the Milton Keynes campus, what advice would you give to somebody who’s interested in running to be a faculty association rep, perhaps within your faculty and more generally?

Cath Well the first thing please get in touch, very, very happy to talk to you about it. And if you’re somewhere handy happy to meet up or anything to discuss. Obviously do feel free to get in touch with any of my colleagues as well. I think one of the big things that you can bring to the role is having an awareness of what student concerns are. So I would say get yourself out and about on social media groups. If you’re on Facebook there’s a very large Open University group with 18,000-odd students, you pick up a lot of concerns there. There are quite a few STEM specific groups. So you get a feel for it and also people get to know you. When people are voting they’re probably going to vote for someone they’ve seen out and about who’s happy to help, happy to listen. The other thing is to find out what’s going on in the OU. So read the information you get when you hear about things like OU Redesign or the Transformation Programme, see what information’s out there. And it’s quite good also because within a faculty you’re often quite focused on your specific school that someone like me who originally studied chemistry it was natural for me to focus quite a lot on chemistry, one of the things I did was try to find out a little bit more about the other schools within the faculty, be it computing and communication, engineering and so on. And the other thing I would say is go for it. I’ve had an absolutely fantastic time.

Philippa Brilliant. So some of the things that Cath mentioned there if you are interested in chatting with students about the redesign you can find conversations going on about that in our forums, if you go to talk to your students association and about the CEC more generally and about the roles if you head over to our website which is oustudents.com and head over to the Your Association page you can find out more about the student leadership team, what their roles involved and who’s in post at the minute. So you mentioned students getting in touch with you do you want to do a little shout out of any of your handles so they can get in touch with you?
Cath  Of course, well my main OU email that's cath.brown@open.ac.uk and that's Cath with a 'C'. If you're on Facebook you can probably find me around the place, I can be a bit loud – sorry guys. I have a page on there which is called the OU Students Association Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Faculty rep – sorry about the rather long title but we do tend to try and spell out our acronyms to avoid it being a bit scary when everyone's talking in acronyms all the time. And I'm also on Twitter and that's @STEMfacultyrep.

Philippa  Brilliant thanks Cath. Do we have any questions from the feed?

Paul  Not at the moment no.

Philippa  Okay.

Cath  Okay.

Philippa  Great shall we wrap it up? Thanks Cath.

Cath  Thank you.

Philippa  Bye.

Cath  Bye.