

**The book with  
the Central  
Executive  
Committee  
Reports in...**

# Contents

Report	Page
Foreword and links to full reports	3
President	4
Deputy President	10
Vice President Administration	17
Vice President Community	21
Vice President Education	27
Vice President Engagement	34
Vice President Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)	40
Vice President Student Support	48
OU Student Member to Council	54
Faculty Association Representative (FBL)	59
Faculty Association Representative (WELS)	64
Faculty Association Representative (FASS)	68
Faculty Association Representative (STEM)	72
Faculty Association Representative (Open & Access)	77
Area Association Representative (England)	80
Area Association Representative (Wales)	85
Area Association Representative (Continental Europe)	91

## Foreword

Welcome to the Central Executive Committee reports to Conference 2022.

The reports have been written to provide some insights, highpoints and achievements of Executive Committee Members for 2020 – 2022.

Their full reports can be found [on the Association website](#).

## President

### Sarah Jones

#### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

As President I wanted to be part of something bigger, I didn't want to be on the side-lines anymore I wanted to be where I could influence change within the Association and the University. I aimed to encourage student partnership, continuing work such as the Student Charter to build relationships that benefit students. Part of the role of Association President is to build those relationships at all levels of the University to raise student issues and to hold the University to account.

As part of this, my priority was to build on the outcomes of the Culture Review, which looked at the governance of the Association and our behaviour policies, especially our approach to discrimination. One specific area was to address issues within our governance which created barriers to inclusion and barriers to students understanding what we do.

I am passionate about lifelong learning and wanted to build on the Associations strategic aims of creating a manifesto for this. As digital poverty can also be a significant barrier to OU students, I wanted to champion digital inclusion within the OU and the external environment.

As President I wanted to enable each member of the Central Executive Committee to take full and active ownership of their area and inspire them to seek opportunities to develop new skills and take on further challenges.

Working with the Association Volunteer and Representation team I aimed to develop a training portfolio to enhance the skillset of the Central Executive Committee members, which would enable them to be more effective in their roles.

What have you achieved so far in your role?

During my term, I have led the work on the governance reforms. I strongly believe these proposed changes can improve the way students interact with us and help them to be more involved.

I am proud to be an OU student and a member of the Students Association. As 2022 is the Associations 50<sup>th</sup> birthday I want to be able to celebrate all our students, past and present. As such I have initiated and taken the lead on our 50<sup>th</sup> project. I wanted to make sure that our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrates the stories of our students, how they engage with us and their successes.

As part of my interactions with the OU, I have been the student lead on the OU's Student Dignity and Respect Policy and the new Student Charter. These both aim to improve the experience of all OU students.

Alongside the Director of Engagement, I have begun to collaborate with Athabasca Students Union, which is based in Canada, and together we have set up a Student Distance Learning Forum. One significant output from our first meeting was to share best practice on community engagement.

I believe that if students can see themselves reflected in the highest levels of governance and throughout the University, they will feel a greater connection with the University. As part of this, I have encouraged greater diversity on the University Council. I sit on the governance and nominations

committee of Council where levels of diversity are discussed, and I successfully encouraged the committee to aim for greater diversity.

In Student Voice week 2020 I advocated for a 'meet the OU senior leadership team' session; due to its success, this was repeated in 2021. I think this is a great way for students to ask questions of those in charge, so they know the University is listening. I also interviewed the Vice Chancellor as part of Freshers week in 2021 with questions from students; this was the first time the Vice Chancellor had been involved in Freshers.

I attended an All-Party Parliamentary group with Minister of State for Higher and Further Education Michelle Donelan. We had our question around maintenance loans for part-time distance learners answered. I have also engaged with different MP's regarding HE policy and the influence it has on part time distance learners.

#### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

I have the privilege of being the student lead on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary project, and I am really excited about seeing some of this come to fruition. It is a huge project and something that I am proud of. As a student led organisation it will be good to see greater student engagement throughout the activities planned. This will hopefully see us well on the way to raising the ambitious target of £50,000 for Open University Student Educational Trust, which is our charitable arm that helps students in need.

I am looking forward to working through any changes conference vote to implement and how we will make them work. It will be exciting to hopefully see the Association fit for the future with new governance.

I am also looking to improve existing relationships with the OU and continue to hold the University to account, raising student issues where they need to be raised.

I am excited to continue the work on Digital Inclusion; I will raise this issue where appropriate with MP's and those in the external environment who can help bring improvements for students.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

As part of the Association strategy, I have worked to embed student voice in the OU, and I have strived to continuously improve our working relationship with the University. I now see the Vice Chancellor's Executive papers pre-meeting and have a discussion with the Pro Vice Chancellor of Students, Liz Marr, to give student input. I have been working hard to always represent student views at every opportunity, including, on Senate and in Council. I have successfully embedded quarterly updates from the Association to Council, in addition to our main yearly update. This informs Council members what the Association and all its volunteers are doing for students. I have also championed Digital Inclusion to improve support for students; including writing to and tweeting MP's who influence policy.

As part of volunteer wellbeing and support, I have worked closely with the Director of Membership Services to examine ways of working more efficiently. This includes ways of spreading the workload to include a diverse range of student voices, by making sure volunteers are on the appropriate committees.

To engage with students and the wider OU family, I write a regular blog, which is published on The Hoot, to ensure that I am informing students what is going on in their Association and to share ways they can be involved.

In order to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year, I have taken a lead role with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary planning to ensure we are truly celebrating what it means to be an OU student. Keep an eye out for the exciting events we have planned for 2022.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

Throughout my term I have combined my full-time role as President with studying for a Master's in Education. I have found that much of what I am learning applies directly to my role as President and vice versa. The idea for the 50<sup>th</sup> was a result of one of the modules I have studied. I have also learnt a lot more about my own prejudices and that has led me to spend more time listening to other people's stories and applying that learning to my role and my life in general.

My 'finest hour' has been a combination of a few things; pushing for greater diversity on Council and sharing why pronouns on an email signature can make a big difference to those who struggle to share who they are. I discussed this with the Vice Chancellor and the next day I received an email showing that he had listened and changed his email signature. These ideas, although appearing small in the grand scheme of things, to me are huge, and I hope will lead to changing culture within the OU and make a lasting difference to our students.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

Some of the most exciting aspects of my role have been sharing my passion for Equality Diversity & Inclusion, and kindness and compassion in leadership with just about anyone who will listen.

One aspect of my role that gives me a real sense of achievement and humbles me the most is when I give the quarterly updates to Council about the work the Association has been doing. I am inspired by the incredible volunteers that we have and the time and effort that they put in. The sheer number of volunteer hours that our elected and non-elected student reps put in to make sure that students have a voice and are supported and represented inspires me every day. I love reading the reports that they all do



and then working out which of their highlights to include when talking to Council. It has been a real pleasure presenting the reports and hearing all the positive feedback, including being told by the Chair of Council that these reports are his favourite bit of Council meetings, which just puts the cherry on the cake. These reports wouldn't be anything at all without the hard work that our student reps and volunteers put into their roles and I am proud to be their President.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

There have been many challenging parts of my role; learning to lead a team of people, most of whom I have never met in person, throughout a pandemic, keeping going whilst home-schooling, maintaining relationships at home and also at work, and finding a work-life balance.

Learning to do this role has been a rollercoaster. One thing I hadn't anticipated is how lonely it can be making some of the decisions I have had to make as President and doing those whilst working from home. However, although loneliness has negative connotations, I have turned it into a positive and it has helped me represent students in a better way as many of our students feel the same when studying. Over the last 18 months or so the pandemic has increased that sense of loneliness for many OU students. I have made sure that I have spoken to others when I have felt this way and I made sure that I have promoted the support services that the OU provide to students too.

I have relied on the team around me to keep me going; the staff team at the Association have been amazingly supportive and helped me when I have needed it.

# Deputy President

## Ian Cheyne

**What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?**

- Fairness
- Community
- Best Study Experience

I've always abhorred unfairness. It's the reason why I was the youngest representative in the Inland Revenue Staff Federation in my teens. Years later I was a department rep with the local government trades union NALGO, and I've participated in conciliatory services such as ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Services). I was never a 'trades unionist'. I simply used the available mechanisms to ensure that everyone was represented equally, and treated equally. I've brought my principles and my experience to the role of Deputy President.

Since first studying with Open University in 1975 I have deplored the absence of a true, university-wide community of students. It's arguably been the one thing missing from my student experience—the only commonality of experience seems to have been the repeated concerns over the value of OU degrees (and qualifications in general) and this is still **being** questioned by students despite the existence of reassuring evidence. The OU itself has done little to establish a true student community—but in all fairness it has to be admitted that the very nature of distance learning works against this.

My involvement with the Student Association for more than 10 years has enabled me to be part of the closest thing to family which is likely to be achievable within the OU. I do believe, however, that with the changes which are currently in progress within the Association we have never been better placed to *significantly* enlarge this family.

**What have you achieved so far in your role?**

- Revision of complaints procedures and Volunteer Policy
- Introduction of a Values and Behaviour Policy
- Establishment of Kindness and Compassion into our values

The Deputy President's role, under normal circumstances, tends to be backstage—but there is always a conscious need to support others, and especially the President. There is a need for awareness (as far as possible) of all the activities of colleagues, perhaps even more so than might be considered generally **needed** with other officer roles.

The biggest difficulty is the relatively short-term appointment period of this one time only post (for any one student). Other officer posts (excluding President) provide an opportunity for continuity by re-election and thereby the accumulation of additional experience over time. The President is in the mix of OU and Association business from the word go. The Deputy, however, has considerably less exposure to the complex structure of the OU's administration on an ongoing basis. The consequence of this is that it takes much longer to get up to speed and gain the essential background knowledge—effectively the first year in office is taken up with fact-finding. I should add troubleshooting (more on this later) to the list of not only first year but also ongoing activities.

It was troubleshooting, however, which led to my involvement with the revisions which have been made, for example, to the Association's complaints procedures and volunteering policy. Having to manage a complaint within the Association was my first week, 'welcome to the party', responsibility—it was undoubtedly the deep end! Thankfully, I am now happy that the revisions referred to above will make for a much happier and reassuring life for all volunteers.

### **What else will you achieve by the end of your term?**

- Support proposals to simplifying procedures, resolving complexities and increasing engagement

The Open University is a complex organisation both administratively and academically. Many changes are in progress to try and tackle these issues by simplifying the often competing elements within its structure. There have been many 'add-ons' in recent times, such as Futurelearn, which need to be absorbed within the organisation and which need to function side by side in a harmonious whole. It isn't surprising therefore that the Association's representative structure can also be quite complex at times. We have to reflect the OU in many respects as part of our representational responsibilities.

The OU has been involved in recent times in governance revisions, all of which should speed up the process of resolving complexity. Substantial changes are also being made by the OU, with its Core Systems Replacement at the heart of a much enhanced student interface.

So as to be able to gain maximum benefit from these changes, the Association needs a more effective and agile volunteer leadership structure. The current proposals to revise the Association's governance are two-fold. In order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmony the

necessary culture is being established. But the framework within which these improvements will function also needs to be as *efficient* as possible, so as to make the whole as *effective* as possible.

I am constantly aware that these changes are not imagined future events but form the basic principles and practice of everything I do, each day. I look forward to ensuring that I have contributed as much as possible to make these changes succeed.

**How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?**

- Enabling and continuing open access
- Providing safe places for both volunteers and all students generally

I have yet to hear anyone within the Association, and indeed within the OU, disagree with the need for the Open University to remain 'open'. The introduction of 'MERS', or minimum entry requirements, is not only counter to the OU's fundamental principles but will undoubtedly undo all the hard work and remarkable successes achieved within recent years to extend HE access to all members of our society. My voice is there as part of the Student Voice to ensure that any attempts at restrictive practices will not succeed. It is a fact that the Student Association does significantly more work on behalf of students, generally, than the majority of the student body is either aware, or willing to acknowledge—it is unlikely that the student unions within other universities fare any better, except perhaps on scale. But we do these things anyway, and they get done, regardless. It is essential, however, that the Association's volunteers are united in providing the help and support that is needed. I mentioned 'troubleshooting' previously. I know that anyone who has not been involved with the Association would be surprised at the amount of time taken up with troubleshooting—my time and also that of other volunteers. And it is

regrettable that a very substantial amount of this work involves volunteers not getting on with one another, for whatever reasons. I see my efforts in this respect as major contributions to the overall effectiveness of the Association, which in turn benefits all students.

**What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far ?**

- **Maintaining equilibrium in difficult contexts for the Association leadership**

This has to be the recognition of internal difficulties within the Association and the need to resolve them as quickly and as completely as possible. Where inflammatory statements/actions have taken place, these have to be identified immediately and comprehensively and all parties encouraged to at least agree to differ on the basis that this is the only way forward for the Association, and its essential work. In these kinds of situations absolute fairness has to be observed—all sides treated with equal respect. I know that I have been able to defuse both actual and potential disputes successfully. I also take every opportunity to ensure that the basic values which have been established by the Association are recognised, accepted, and observed. It isn't easy. But persistence pays. This has all been done in tandem with the development of the new Volunteering Policy and the new Values and Behaviour Policy. By creating safer spaces for volunteers and by pushing the OU for safer spaces for all students, we can go a long way to establishing, and expanding, our harmonious community. The need for troubleshooting of course will never go away. But with a united front those who deliberately go out of their way to make trouble will become conspicuous and consequently more easily dealt with. Many of the complexities of the previous 'complaints' system have been simplified and clarification provided where this was needed. Through acting on the basis of prevention in the first instance and where necessary simplifying the 'cure',

the essential elements of a successful volunteering service have been strengthened.

**What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?**

- Understanding and appreciating the ways in which both the OU's and the Associations activities interlink and using this knowledge to improve things for students

I've previously spoken about the complexity of the Open University in its role as Higher Education provider. At first glance, even the higher level elements such as Council and Senate can be difficult to understand from an outsider's point of view. But this is just the starting point.

The university has its faculties, study disciplines and modules which combine to enable a variety of HE qualifications to be obtained. And within each again are the steering and working groups, and so on, along with boards of study and a whole range of sub-committees. Gaining an understanding of these and how they mesh together has been challenging. It has also been rewarding since a practical awareness of the whole structure enables a view of how students may be helped, both as individuals and groups.

Additionally, with all the developments taking place within HE and its provision it is essential to the effectiveness of student representation to have an understanding of how the future is being shaped so as to cope with the difficulties of today and to establish how the dictates of external agencies and internal needs impact on these.

From an early age I was very good at doing jigsaw puzzles (I'm told that I could complete 500 piece puzzles without help when I was five). During my many years as a computer/business systems analyst it was always extremely satisfying to be able to find relatively straightforward solutions to complex

business problems. Understanding the OU and how it serves its students has been equally satisfying, although *difficult* areas remain.

**What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?**

- Troubleshooting rifts between students

Having spoken about troubleshooting there is another aspect of business, whether charitable or commercial, which regrettably has to be faced from time to time—firefighting. This involves finding quick and usually temporary fixes for problems which arise unexpectedly. I said that I'd inherited a serious problem internal to the Association and its volunteers right at the beginning of my term of office. It was far from pleasant. It was clear that a rift within the Association's leadership team could have serious consequences. Without its being effectively dealt with as quickly as possible, any plans for the development of student support services might well be jeopardized. The Open University Students Association and its success as a charitable provider of student support can only be achieved by a combination of good professional management and volunteers who are able to work effectively and harmoniously as a team, as well as individually.

I would like to say that the 'rift' was completely healed. Sadly there continue to be ramifications. What I can say, however, is that this specific problem became a spur to ensuring that similar problems would not occur again in the future. There is no magic wand but it has been possible to put in place policies to handle these kinds of issues. By ensuring that Association volunteers are recruited and supported in such a way that they can feel comfortable and safe in their activities, and, that an effective mechanism exists to resolve individual differences before they become major disputes, providing further support to all involved, then we will have come a long way from that initial confrontation.



## VP Administration

### Matt Porterfield

Duration: I have been on the CEC in this role since the elections in 2020, prior to that I was on the CEC as FBL Faculty Association Representative. I have been volunteering with the Association since 2017.

#### What did I set out to achieve when I joined the CEC?

My manifesto included the following areas that I had identified as having room for improvement and/or where I thought I could contribute my skills and experience:

- Undertake a long overdue review of the financial and management information of the Association to make more understandable and become a useful tool to cost centre managers.
- Have the expertise to advise Trustees and the Executive Committee on any financial implications.
- Support societies and encourage them to comply with our rules.
- Have oversight of, and take responsibility for maintaining, by-laws, constitutional and election rules.

I also had a bullet point about the subvention, the funding which we receive from the Open University in order to operate as a Student Association as this was in the role description, however during my time in office the practice of meeting and negotiating this with the OU has not occurred.

#### What have I achieved so far in my role?

Firstly, I have to emphasise that I have been working with the staff in Finance and Resources to fulfil my role and could not have achieved

anything without the wonderful support of them, particularly Alison Lunn. None of my achievements are personal to me, they are a result of collaboration and teamwork with the relevant staff.

On the first two bullet points, the Chart of Accounts has been completely revised to show more relevant detail and better clustering of accounts into meaningful headings. This has resulted in better information for cost centre managers and improved reporting to the Board of Trustees and CEC. The Annual Accounts are improving every year with enhanced explanatory notes. I also review the reports and accounts before they are issued and I am able to ask naive questions or request additional explanations if something is not clear to a non-financial reader.

The State of Societies report is now showing accurate information for the first time since I started questioning it in 2019, non-compliant societies have now been supported and encouraged to follow the rules and dormant societies have been wound up. I have also started attending the Societies Committee and now jointly approve grants to societies, neither of which previously occurred.

Perhaps the largest of the tasks recently is where I am heavily involved in reviewing the Articles, Bye-laws and election rules prior to conference. This has been driven by the comprehensive Governance Review recommendations. Every paragraph has been scrutinised by the small internal team as well as by our legal advisers, the OU and a larger cohort of students and staff through consultation.

#### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

I find myself involved in a number of ongoing activities, some through my role where I am *ex officio* on other committees in the Association, or as a member of an OU academic committee, and some through requests from colleagues. Then there are the *ad hoc* groups that spring up from time to

time, some come to a natural end but others go on to become part of the norm. If we, as a team, can get the proposed governance reforms passed by the membership prior to the January AGM then I can see a bright future for the Association going forward.

**How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?**

The role of VP Admin is not directly student facing so my efforts are mainly behind the scenes, representing the student voice on ensuring our finances are reported, transparent and controlled, sitting on the Board of Trustees *ex-officio* and becoming a Trustee of our grant-making charity OU Students Education Trust. I also am involved in ensuring our regulations and bye-laws are appropriate, updated and adhered to by all. Our Articles of Association, the top-level rules of how our Association is run since we became incorporated, and our bye-laws, the more detailed rules and procedures, have undergone a full review which was driven by the governance recommendations and should be robust enough to serve us until the next planned major review in 2026.

**What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?**

I would like to think I have shown this role can add value to the Association through healthy scrutiny of all aspects of current practice as there is a tendency over time for customs and procedures to lapse into familiarity and thus for blind adherence to become the norm. Before I joined the leadership team I observed at a CEC meeting and noticed behaviour that gave me slight concern. The financial papers passed with little questioning and I suspected that they were not completely understood or of interest to everyone. The State of Societies paper had obvious items which should have raised concerns over accuracy but once again did not appear to be considered

important. It has taken a couple of years however I think that these two areas now have a more correct focus at meetings.

**What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?**

The most exciting part has to be involvement in the proposed governance changes as I can see the benefits that these can bring to the Association leadership, particularly creating a larger leadership forum which will not only increase the democratic voice but will also lessen the individual workload of those who are elected or appointed to it. The smaller, leaner leadership team will also enable faster reactions to changing circumstances, something we have seen plenty of in the last couple of years, and a more focused remit.

**What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?**

The biggest challenge is undoubtedly introducing major change, particularly if it is perceived negatively by those who find themselves outside of a comfort zone they have enjoyed for a number of years. The implementation of a more democratic and modern governance structure would be difficult enough in normal pre-Covid times however trying to communicate this through online only means has led to challenges of misunderstanding and even mistrust that changes are being done quietly behind people's backs.

In order to provide reassurance, we have employed a variety of communication and consultation events and vehicles, with disappointingly low online attendance and participation. I would urge anyone who is still unsure about the proposed changes to read the literature that is being produced for this AGM which is available on our website

[www.oustudents.com](http://www.oustudents.com)

## VP Community

### Anca Seaton

Duration of office: 1 August 2020 – present

What did you set out to achieve?

In March 2020, at the start of a difficult time for us all, I put pen to paper, or fingers on the keyboard, and set out my vision for the OU students community.

The key points of my manifesto were based on raising awareness of the Students Association and developing more online opportunities for students to engage with, benefit from and be proud of their student community.

Little I knew how a global pandemic were going to affect us, in all aspects of our lives. Studying with the OU can be a lonely experience in normal times, but faced with the reality of lockdown, isolation and lack of human contact, it can become a burden, and sometime the last thing to do when real life is extremely challenging.

We have more younger students, we are more reliant on technology, we have less free time and more commitments. For me, the common denominator of all these things in relation to building and sustaining a student community was to organise more events online. They can be attended by a larger number of students, are more convenient in terms of travel time and money, and are open to any OU students, wherever they are.

There are several ways of achieving this. My efforts were directed to Freshers Fortnight events (twice a year), clubs and societies events, online meetups.

I wanted to empower students to feel they belong to the great OU students community, be proud of it and feel supported by it.

### Achievements

As a true STEM student, I would like to illustrate my achievements with a few figures first:

#### **Freshers Fortnight**

- 136 sessions organised by the Students Association and the OU
- 6272 sign ups to the Freshers mailing list
- 773 new sign ups to monthly newsletter following the 2021J Freshers Fortnight

#### **Clubs and societies**

Start of term – 54 clubs – 15470 members

Present – 84 Clubs – 31683 members

Start of term – 22 societies – 5289 members

Present – 17 societies - 8107 members

Students Association, Clubs and Societies online events this term: approx. 150 to date

Recruitment of the 2021 and 2022 University Challenge Teams

Overall, the engagement and awareness of the Students Association is rising. We are seeing more students getting involved in events, becoming members of our clubs and societies, and generally knowing more about what we do and how we can help them.

I could not have achieved any of these figures without the help and support of the Association Community Team, our community volunteers (Online Meetup Hosts, Clubs and Societies volunteers) or the involvement of colleagues on the Central Executive Committee.

What else will you achieve by the end of this term?

At the time of writing this report, there are several projects ongoing: we are preparing for Freshers Fortnight January/February 2022, Clubs Review, the preparation for the Students Association presence at residential schools (online).

Our national and regional Facebook groups can do with a refresh and infusion of enthusiasm, new voices and mutual support, so the next step is to create a new volunteering role for our dedicated Facebook groups admins. This will provide relevant training and support, and also officially recognise the dedication, time and effort they put into making these spaces become real local communities.

In spring 2021, we are looking at opening the recruitment for our face to face meetup hosts. We had lots of enquiries from students about organising this type of events, but the pandemic prevented us from going ahead. Here is hope we can proceed in the spring.

Another area that needs attention is societies. Some of them need help and support in recruiting committee members, others could do with social media training, etc. It is my intention to update and upgrade the support and training provided to them.

Last, but not least, the increase in online events brought with it situations we did not foresee 2 years ago, so we are working at learning from what happened and update our training and support offered to volunteers in order to have a supportive, inclusive and vibrant OU students community.

### Making a positive difference

The OU student community is vibrant, diverse, supportive. When I stood for this role, my aim was to make a positive difference for all OU students.

My first thought was “Studying with the OU is a lonely experience... only if you want it to be.” Everything I do in my role is about raising awareness of the Students Association, how we can help and support students, and especially how to make them feel they belong to the OU students community.

In “Educating Rita”, Willy Russell writes “education gives you a choice”. I wanted to give OU students the choice to be part of the community if they wanted to, and I wanted the offer to be varied, inspirational, relevant and supportive.

### Significant achievement

There is not a single “significant achievement” that I can put my hand on. For me, it’s making sure we have events happening, our clubs and societies are doing well, we are inclusive and accessible to all.

I could not achieve any of my manifesto pledges without the support of the wonderful Community Team: Jess, Pete, Lara, Sandra and Georgia. They helped me make my ideas and thoughts become reality, at times stepped in when real life got in the way and sometime intervened when necessary.

If I were to put my hand on one significant achievement, I would say reading a message in a group on social media from a student saying “I know that because I’ve heard it at Freshers” or “I met my study buddy in a Students Association club or society”.



Most exciting aspect of the role

Without a shadow of a doubt, the most exciting aspect of my role is... Freshers Fortnight! At the same time a blessing and a curse, it's a wonderful opportunity to meet lots of new students, introduce them to the Association, share study tips, have a laugh, see them making friends. I believe a good Freshers Fortnight equips the participants with tools and information to help them throughout their student journeys.

Most challenging moment of the role

"Challenging" I think is the word of this term. Nobody could predict the pandemic or how profoundly it affected all our lives. At times, it felt like we were walking on a tightrope, trying to balance life, family, work, studies, friends, our own health and wellbeing.

For me, there wasn't just a moment. It was a collection of situations and experiences. The increase in online events brought with it a plethora of problems. It was, for a while, trial and error. We relied on our volunteers giving up their time and energy to keep the community spirit going and to support students who felt lonely or isolated. We were not very familiar with the technology, so we all learned together and shared our knowledge.

The lack of face to face interactions played a very important role in making this term extremely challenging. The Central Executive Committee should work as a team, supporting each other, helping each other, pulling together for the benefit of the students. It was, and still is, very difficult to achieve this without face to face contact. We had plenty of online meetings, but we could never create the bonds we would have created by sitting in the same room, talking, discussing, sharing information.

The online meetings have their uses, but they make us tired and didn't give us the opportunity for a chat before and after the meeting. Technical problems can occur as well, making the whole situation very stressful.

## VP Education

### Cin McGuigan

#### Duration of Office

Since 1st August 2020 (so 18 months so far)

#### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

Having just checked my manifesto pledges, I see that I stood for this role to try to implement Individual Representation at the Students Association and to expand the current academic representation team to be much more inclusive, diverse, and ensure that it better reflected the makeup of the wider student body.

As a previous Central Committee Rep I had felt that there were a number of things that could be done to ensure that the support offered to new reps was better. I wanted to foster a stronger sense of community in academic representation, and I felt we could do more to embed a sense of appreciation and value in our conduct towards all of our volunteers.

We had been without a VP Education for a lot of the last term, and that ownership of academic reps was spread across a number of other reps, and while I firmly believe they did an amazing job on top of their own workload knew we could make a lot of difference by having a committed and driven person in that post and it was that belief that made me want to be that person.

I also wanted to play a bigger part in the student voice at the OU. I wanted to ensure that we continued the last CEC team's push to get students in all decision making spaces. I have fought to get more student involvement in key spaces that make the choices that impact on the learning provided here.

What have you achieved so far in your role?

I have been actively involved in launching the Individual Representation project, it launched in August 2021 and fields multiple queries every day. Students recognise the service is supportive and helps them at times that they need it the most.

I just delivered the most successful training session for new representatives I have been involved with. We recently appointed a number of fantastic new students to roles right across the governance structure. We have students from all faculties, and with a wide range of lived experience that fully reflects the drive to be more diverse and inclusive. Some schools are really hard to get people to engage with us. But I can proudly state that we have appointed a number of PostGraduate Research students and we now have representation from Policing Apprentices for the first time ever.

The work that has been implemented by the Appointments Committee, which I chair, has been really effective this time around. We have made a number of changes based on lessons learned and I am the proudest I have ever been as the person with the oversight of academic representation. I feel that I achieved my manifesto pledges this weekend, and look forward to working with the most engaging new team we have seen for a while.

I am actively involved in a range of activities on behalf of students, and sit on working groups looking at Learning Adjustments, Quality Enhancement, Teaching and Learning and the Future of Remote Exam Delivery to name a few.

What else will you achieve by the end of your term? (250 words)

I will build on the work in Individual Representation. We still have a lot to do. I aim to help shape the way the OU responds to academic misconduct and

ensure that fewer students need to go through the complaints and appeals process.

I will follow up on the great work we are doing in academic representation. Getting the best people in place, and supporting them to be the most effective they can be is key to this role, and I firmly commit to following through on what we are doing.

I will work to ensure the Association and the Open University are being much more inclusive and accessible. I have been engaged with activities to ensure we were able to work during the pandemic with as little disruption as possible. Some policies are now reverting to pre-pandemic regulations, and some were never fully supportive during the work-from-home mandates either. I aim to ensure some minimum accessibility standards are adhered to and rolled out.

Many of us have been impacted this last year and a half, we are having to do more with less, and we need to consider the ways we can support students better. We don't want to drive people away by not getting the papers they need sent out on time, or supplying them in a format they can't use. I don't want anyone to be in a position where they have to choose between ink costs to print material out and their groceries.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'? (250 words)

I have worked tirelessly over my term to ensure that what we do here at the Association has positive effects for students.

I actively engage with the university on issues such as learning adjustments, which means that materials are going out on time much more this year than they have been doing. I also deal with a lot of the delays due to pending results, the standardisations applied to the first lot of remote exams, credit

transfer issues, all of which impact the student satisfaction. If you are waiting for an outcome to your module, or have been accused of plagiarism, or if you believe you have been unfairly marked, or that you will miss the deadline for registration due to delays getting your transferred credit sorted, it makes you feel excluded as a student. I have worked to ensure these things are sorted quickly, and if not, the Individual Representation service can help them make formal complaints.

As for impact and engagement, the success of this recruitment cycle for academic reps is evidence of my impact as VP Education. I have hit a number of my own personal targets there, and am actively engaged in the work to make more diverse representation the standard across the board.

And I am working on how the OU best supports students with declared protected characteristics, and have gathered a working group to ensure that we make a difference. This will impact all students with additional needs to ensure equity and fairness.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

*What are you proudest of? What has been your 'finest hour'? This might not necessarily be something that you achieved for students, it's what's been most significant for you as a volunteer and as an individual.*

One of the things VP Education has been involved with is the Quality Monitoring and Enhancement process at the OU. This is the way in which the university ensures that all of the schools within the faculties are delivering quality teaching and upholding standards.

I was invited to observe the process, they always believed that students can bring a fresh perspective and they are asked to observe every session. I spoke to the student rep who had observed the last year's process to see what I needed to do to prepare. They suggested that more student

involvement would be brilliant if we could get it, that it was exhausting but fun to engage with up to 18 meetings over two days, and that I needed to set aside a few days to read the papers beforehand.

When the Peer Review Group chair reached out to me to invite me to be an observer, I asked that she come along to our student rep monthly drop in session to share what they do and how reps can best engage with the process. From that meeting, we had a longer chat about how to better work in partnership, with the outcome that VP Education now is a co-chair of the group. It means I am engaged fully, I chair half of the meetings, I help pull together thoughts and ideas that are raised for the report.

We have a voice in the place that has the most impact on teaching and learning.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

One of the things I wanted to do was make sure that every single one of the volunteers and representatives that were engaged with us felt a sense of belonging, a sense of community and that they could see that we valued and appreciated all that they have done for us.

As a long term volunteer in a number of spaces I always worked harder and more effectively if I could see that the people I volunteered for valued my input.

For me, being VP Education is a continual journey to show the academic representatives, the Central Committee Reps, the Senate Reference Group members, our Student Experience Links that I truly value and am grateful for the time, effort and energy they give to us in the service of their roles. We can't be effective in affecting change without the efforts of those reps, they are the reason we are making changes and having the impact we do. And

without them the Students Association wouldn't be able to fulfil that Impact and Engagement side of our Strategy as easily as we can now.

I implemented a monthly drop in meeting fro all reps to come and share their ideas and concerns, in part to foster that sense of community and teamwork that I felt was missing. And some of the feedback I have had about those sessions show me that it is working as intended.

That for me has been my key driver, that sense of belonging is working.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

This role has really pushed me out of my comfort zone. In order to be effective I have to chair meetings, present training sessions, and host meetings and events. None of those come easy to me. I took a short course on how to chair meetings, I got more comfortable being on camera and filming. But it is still a challenge. And it takes a lot of energy to be 'on' in that way for extended periods. But I have a great staff team to support me through those sessions.

I have struggled to engage fully in a wholly online environment. When I stood, the expectation was that most of the big things I do, like chairing both the Senate Reference Group and Appointments Committee, and attending the Senate and Central Executive Committee meetings would all be face to face.

Because of the pandemic these have all become online obligations and for me, like many students, I don't always have the capacity or the technology to be on-screen for hours at a time. And getting papers sent out in time to digest them and respond in an informed way has been harder due to a number of issues that we still need to work on.

Also, digital capacity, infrastructure, broadband locally all impact what I do. And some of these are out of our control. But we need to work to ensure all



reps can access what they need to be able to work effectively on behalf of the Association.

# VP Engagement

## Fanni Zombor

### Duration of Office

18 months

### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

For some of my role this term I wanted to build on the work I had done in my previous role as Vice President Media and Campaigns, but also to produce new initiatives including:

- Improving our current website
- Furthering the development of our student magazine, The Hoot, by involving more students in the content creation
- Relaunching the STUDIO umbrella brand for engaging video and audio content
- Refreshing our Association brand
- Working with the OU (Open University) to give us more visibility on StudentHome and their various platforms
- Reaching a better agreement for contacting students via the OU systems and/or look at the possibility to allow students to opt-in for our Newsletter at signing up
- Researching the feasibility to have Association leaflets in the book packages
- Ensuring consistent engagement across all faculties
- Ensuring Student Voice is done meaningfully across all OU departments
- Working in partnership with the OU MarComms team to benefit both sides and see where joint working is possible
- Be visible and available to students via a range of platforms

- Run and shape the Student Experience discussion sessions

What have you achieved so far in your role?

Although it would be impossible to list every achievement so far, some of my highlights have been:

- Working with the Library to communicate the referencing changes to Cite Them Right with students
- Running online events to support students during lockdown and recruiting new volunteers to help scale up these events
- Delivered a FAQ list to the OU on the issues of international students and Brexit as well as students studying full-time, both of which are now at the help centre
- Overseen the 2020 OU student consultation events, including choosing and developing the consultation topics and the Association's involvement
- Raised the profile of OU students externally, by contributing to a report called 'Module evaluation during National Lockdown' looking at the impacts of the pandemic on students across the UK
- Delivered the Association's Communications Strategy and related projects to get a clear vision for extending our reach and engaging more students
- Have overseen the evaluation of our Annual Membership Survey 2020, giving us insight and areas for improvement on our offer to students
- Have sponsored a project to refresh our Association brand, to give us a clearer and refreshed identity towards the whole student body
- Securing leaflets about the Association to go in every single book pack delivered to students from October 2021, increasing our visibility in OU prospectuses by having half a page dedicated to us in the latest issue and refreshing the content about the Association in OU induction materials

- Many more, some mentioned later in this report

#### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

In terms of my manifesto, I have a few things left on it I would like to deliver. The new year will see a trial of engaging regular contributors in our student magazine, The Hoot, to enable us to make content student-led and written as much as possible. I am also very hopeful that there will be time left to restart our video and audio content series, under the STUDIO umbrella term, as over the past 12 months we have had a lot of requests for easily digestible content people can engage with easily. I also hope to push the OU further in allowing the Association to be more visible to students across all their platforms, although I think this will be a recurring theme for anybody being in this role in the future.

I participate in many meetings that will either wrap up before the end of my term or will continue as long-term meetings beyond August 2022. The National Student Survey is opening in January, which I will still see through and hopefully beat our previous completion and satisfaction rates. I will also be closely looking at our Annual Membership Survey result analysis to help the Association improve where it needs to, and hopefully also see through the survey system project looking at engaging students in surveys throughout their module as well as carrying on being the student voice on the OU's Core System Replacement project, which aims to improve all OU IT systems.

#### How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

Throughout this term, I have been readily available to students to provide information, support, and advice across all different aspects of their student journey – module registrations, tutor issues, alternative format deliveries, extensions, special circumstances, navigating student support and the impact of assessment cancellations due to the pandemic just to name a few.

I also socialise with students and run a club specifically for our younger students, and being a known face helps me raise awareness of the Association and it allows me to encourage greater engagement with all our services.

When I was deciding my manifesto and whenever I go to meetings or join projects, I always try to think of my student self and what gaps I have in my student journey to help me prioritise what is most important for students. Although I do a lot of partnership working with the university, I am often a critical friend to them, and I can always have a credible voice in meetings to ensure decisions are made with students interests at heart.

I have been a member of the Association's EDI working group from the start, as we have recognised the diversity gap we have with our engaged students. This group allows us to focus on those hardest to reach and over time, to make sure their voices are not diluted by the majority, and that we can become an appealing Association to all of our members.

#### What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

My most impactful project has been Student Voice Week, both in 2020 and 2021. Although the event has been organised in the past, it offered limited opportunities for students to get involved in decision making and engagement. I knew I wanted to bring together a large scale of events across a week, making it as accessible and as wide ranging to students as we could. Both years, I have led the delivery and organising groups consisting of student reps and Association and OU staff to help plan, deliver and evaluate the event. The support from both OU and Association has been huge, with everyone finding their feet on the kinds of sessions that are of interest to students. We have been able to engage thousands of students over 2 years, attracting lots of them to become further involved in decision making and most importantly empowering them to have a say in their study journey and what the future should look like. The events have been a mix of focus groups, blogs, forum activities, socialising opportunities and Q & A sessions.

My personal highlight was getting to pose student submitted questions to the OU's senior team and our President, which was a very direct way to be the voice for students. Rachel Garnham, OU staff member and co-lead of the organising group, and I had the opportunity to present at a higher education sector event, where we had great support and a desire to learn from external colleagues.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

Delivering the new website has been a very exciting, long-term project from the start of my role. After identifying the need for a new website in my previous term, the start of this term focused very heavily on understanding the current website, how our students use it and what a new website would look like in an ideal world. I have learnt lots about website analytics, the current trends for websites of our kind and accessibility to make our new site the best it can be. An intensive research period has seen us running focus groups, surveys and having various discussions with students, leadership team members and staff to make sure the new site is as close to our present and long term needs as possible. Following the requirements document being finalised, we tendered for providers to convince us they would be the best option for us to go with. Alongside the current website provider, we have seen pitches from providers specialising in Student Unions and charities as well. The choice was made to go with an SU specialist provider, MSL which has been working with us ever since to design and build our new site - the most exciting part of the project where I got to see various layout options, make decisions on the menu options and content, whilst doing my best to keep student usability at the front of decision making. At the time of writing this report, the website is due to launch any day.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

The pandemic has had a big impact on the way we do things but having had some months to adapt to our new normal in the previous term, I felt well prepared for the start of term. What nobody could predict was the significant increase in workload – both in terms of quality and quantity of things now being asked of student representatives. Partnership working and

student representative input have been thriving across the OU for the past 18 months, but this has carried many hours of extra meetings, papers and expectations of appearances across the board. Having a full-time job, my studies and my volunteering role has created a lasting tension between my responsibilities, so I often have to figure out which projects and commitments are the most key to this role, and where I could ask for a leadership team colleagues support or open the opportunity to other student representatives. Overall, the biggest challenge has been finding the time for engagement (despite the name of my role!) as after long hours of commitments, engaging with students on forums and social media has been difficult. We live and learn, and I have found a good balance some of the time, with lots of staff, leadership team and family support.

## VP EDI

### Patrice Belton

#### Duration of Office

15 months (1Year & 4Months)

#### 1. What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

As a Student Representative and Leader I desired to:

*'...improve, impact and advocate for; 'inclusion, representation, support, collaboration and accountability within the Open University (OU) and it's student community, by **challenging cultures** and helping to **bridge gaps** on behalf of underrepresented and marginalised groups; in line with the Associations Strategy and plight to embed E D I as practice and praxis.'*

My vision was to help students discover and embrace their sense of belonging, by exemplifying that someone truly wants them to be a part of this community. I wanted them to be involved, and to feel empowered towards sharing their stories, challenges and/or victories, whilst feeling listened to and able to find solutions to things which mattered for them (by referring to others who could take action on their behalf).

I wanted to be that person who showed up and kept showing up for students; one who could help them know and believe their VOICES (Values, Opinions, Inclusion, Choices and Equity) mattered. This may have been ambitious, but I believed it was one worthy of my investment!

That remains my goal and passion because, no student should be made to feel marginalised or invisible for being who they are; irrespective of whether



others care or seek to understand them or not. These students deserve visibility, representation and to be proud in any room whilst having a valued seat at any table, as any other student would because;

*'Being a community is having a voice; and having a voice is everything!'*

## 2. **What have you achieved so far in your role?**

### ***Race Equality and Bridging gaps:***

- Supporting the Access and Participation Plan, I sat on the 'Mental Health (MH) Declaration for Black Students Task and Finish Group'. Here, I offered my expertise, lived experiences and student's insights around inclusive language and communications when relating to MH and wellbeing.
- I have also supported the interview process for the 'Dean for EDI' and the 'Programme Director for Marketing and Outreach', which are both enabling the University to structure and shape its work around Race Equality, and also in how the university engages with and markets their offering to Black and Brown students.

### ***Accountability***

Championed for, supported and help the Association to employ their first 'EDI Project's officer' (who will help to balance the output of Student Welfare Support and EDI Support for students and to increase focused support to those who need it most).

### ***Challenging cultures***

As part of our commitment and promise to our broader EDI work; following the 2020 'Black Lives Matter' protests and our Statement towards change for students, I supported the formation and continued development of the

Associations' EDIWG, which I co-chair. To date, much progress has been made in that space, from the introduction and implementation of 'Equality Impact Assessments' for all our student-facing events; continued training and development for our Student Reps and Volunteers (including putting on an EDI Conference in June 2021).

### ***Inclusion***

*(Gender Equality):*

I have supported the OU Athena Swan initiative as part of their Self-Assessment team; which includes obtaining data from across all our departments and units. Initially, students were excluded from the work as it relates mostly to a campus based approach, but I petitioned the committee to have a standing (agenda) item to discuss and support gender equality issues for students. This was successfully granted in September 2021.

### **3. What else will you achieve by the end of your term?**

To be honest, this is a complex question, and I would do students a disservice to not appreciate that there isn't a definitive answer, but (rather) opportunities for improved adaptability and exploration...

However, I wish to continue:

- Helping the (established) Support Groups to elect, co-opt and develop their Committees further; and helping the E D I Projects officer and Association Staff Teams to train, mentor, support and empower them towards supporting, advocating for and, developing events and opportunities for students, relating (but not limited) to; community building, visibility, accessibility, engagement and representation.
- Liaising more with students with protected characteristics and intersectionalities to ensure we are consistently reviewing these

connections and our offerings, to help them to nurture a sense of belonging, as part of the Students Association and OU communities.

- Helping the E D I Working Group (Association) to facilitate more engaging and collaborative ‘Students Insights’ sessions; to practice deep and active listening whilst empowering students to embrace and share their stories and lived experiences.
- Helping students inform, influence and utilise the standing agenda item for students on the Gender Equality Steering Group (GESG) to ensure student Gender equality is not only included but supported with the OU’s strategic plans and structures.
- Support the OU’s Race Equality Charter submission to build awareness and encourage Race equality within the OU student body to support removing barriers and unfair disadvantages faced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Students.

4. How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of ‘making a positive difference for all OU Students’?

*Report and Support (EDI from an EDI perspective)*

Sitting on the Safe Space Reporting Implementation Group has been an extremely important and pinnacle piece of work. This tool seeks to help students share their concerns and experience in a safe (and sometimes anonymous way), to encourage students to speak up and to feel supported in a difficult situation. Throughout my time in this group, I have helped to influence and inform on how the tool was shaped, by being able to share the collective student voice and first-hand reflections. For example, I have had several students express the difficulties they have had in putting forward their complaints (using the OU’s system) and, their reflections of feeling vulnerable, being put on the spot and/or being unheard whilst having little pastoral support in doing so, which have impacted confidence to report.

## Student Mental Health Working Group (SMHWG)

I am also working closely with the Student Mental Health Working Group (SMHWG) to help signpost, inform and shape resources for students, including the support being offered by the OU's Gender Identity Champions, which is a critical role for students. However those roles have their limitations when it comes to lived experiences and broader understanding of some groups they support (e.g. our Transgender, Non-binary and Gender Nonconforming cohorts), so I have encouraged the SMHWG to invite the Chair of the OU's Trans Network to share their insights and experiences to help influence and inform how we can also mitigate and shape our offerings to these marginalised groups more inclusively.

### 5. What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

Helping to bring the Support Groups together; by facilitating and establishing a collective space for Group Leads to communicate, build working partnerships, share good practices and support each other as 'one team'. This ensures that I can inform, support, mentor and work collectively with all the Group Leaders whilst helping to build a community and ethos of E D I and support across the board.

Additionally, I am proud of the toil and investments I have made with OU units (particularly the Access, Participation and Success team) and the Association and Student community (particularly, the launch and continued support in establishing channels for VOICE from within the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students' community and E D I Working Group).

This has been an uphill plight and matter close to heart 'being a Black, Caribbean, O U Alumni and Volunteer who have had my own challenges MH

(e.g. Anxiety Disorders) whilst studying’, and I truly struggled to find others who could understand my personal journey from a cultural and representative perspective, as the term ‘Mental Health’ often conveyed different meaning, stigmas, shame and the lack of awareness within my community. Thus, I had an extremely complexed and difficult student experience at the OU, not knowing where to turn, which left me feeling isolated and marginalised.

My desire was to change that for other students, and although this remains a work in progress, there are now channels for discussions to start and, collective work (being carried across the OU and Association), which I and other students can help to develop further and contribute to.

#### 4. What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

***‘Embracing my own VOICE, trusting that it is relevant and that it does matter, irrespective of whether others (openly) provide a platform for me to use it within (or not)!’***

Knowing that I have something worthwhile and valuable to say, contribute and could use to help support others (whilst having the ability to hear and embrace their stories even in a small group of their peers) because someone (**me**, as a representative of the Association) has provided them with that opportunity and truly care to listen.

Knowing I wake up every day (some days feeling perplexed, fatigued and riddled with imposter syndrome and anxieties) challenged; yet, I have purpose, compassion resilience and heart to face every email, student query, demand from (OU and Association) staff or external organisations; professionally, insightfully, critically and openly. Having the opportunity and support (both from many Association and OU Staff and Leaders) to be an equal partner, facilitator, host, Chair, (student) representative and colleague in different rooms and whilst sitting at the table. Feeling encouraged,

listened to and inspired speak out (for the most part and irrespective of my intersectionalities) because what I have to say will and can make a difference.

Being approached by (both) staff and students (some holding more accolades and expertise than I have) asking for my opinion or wishing to share their stories with me because I help them feel safe, empowered, valued and included.

These are what encourages me to look past discouraging moments and to persevere.

#### **5. What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?**

##### **‘Not having the capacity to show up for every student!!’**

The pandemic had an excruciating effect on my personal and family life, so whilst I was at times doing my best to show up for students, be present and represent, there were times where my MH, physical availability and wellbeing were compromised; this was significant between March and May 2021, where I had to step away from all duties, to support my husband.

Taking the decision to step away from my role was emotionally conflicting because throughout the pandemic I often felt unable to reach every student in need of help; some required quick fixes and reassurances and others needed pastoral support. I felt I was letting students down and made efforts to be available for students, sometimes sabotaging sleep and it was having a negative impact, but my compassion and accountability to honour my vow to students made me question putting my wellbeing first.

I had to ask for help and to acknowledge my limitations both as a volunteer and an individual. Confiding in the Staff team truly helped me reflect differently and to feel supported.

Once I had returned, I committed to change my ways of working and to invest more training and self-regulation (including having regular check ins with Staff), which over time manifested into a Wellbeing Teams channel for the CEC and Staff team and, helping the SMHWG to develop an Associates Lecturer's Toolkit to (train and enable Tutors to better) support students and themselves with their MH and wellbeing concerns.

# VP Student Support

## Alison Kingan

### Duration of Office

A number of years.

### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

My main aim is to make a positive difference to students' experiences especially regarding reducing stress. That includes listening to and responding to students, talking to OU staff about student concerns or queries, being well prepared for meetings so I can put the student perspective across, and ensuring the Association offers superb support.

From an Association perspective my main hands-on experience is as Deputy Chair and Trustee of the charity OUSET (OU Students Educational Trust) and overseeing the Peer Support Service. I aimed to continue to make improvements but also to ensure students are aware of them. In addition to the information being on the Association website I wanted to make sure student facing OU staff know about them so they can pass this on to students.

### What have you achieved so far in your role?

I sat on numerous Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups, often as the only student, set up by the OU for single issues or themes. It often entails reading papers and speaking up for what students want. These include the GBV / DV (Gender Based / Domestic Violence) student policy working group, EDISG (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion Steering Group), Corporate Parenting Steering Group (for students who have had care experience, established by



OU in Scotland) and Communications to students. The Communications Group hopefully resulted in shorter and less formal communications to students from the OU.

I was involved in Freshers to share information about what support the Association offers. I helped run a Student Voice Week session aimed at informing students about good academic practice.

An ongoing Task and Finish group is looking into ensuring better support for students taking a postponed exam or EMA or retaking their exam or EMA. My input included ensuring the OU considers how it words initial communications to recognize the different circumstances and needs of students.

I oversee the Peer Support Service; students can ask Supporters one off questions or receive longer one to one support. I chair Peer Supporter Meetings and am involved in appointments of new Supporters. An evaluation process has been introduced so students can give feedback. I am an OUSET Trustee as part of this role and I was elected as Deputy Chair. This involves making decisions on students' applications for funds, attending meetings, and ensuring OUSET is financially secure.

#### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

I will continue to work on various items mentioned in this report. Here are some additional ones -

1. I would love to see the Study Tips PDF become larger and more adaptable than its current PDF format and to find ways to use the study tips that were sent in but not included in the PDF.
2. Recently I have become involved in a long term project that is considering how to better prepare and support students studying modules with emotionally challenging content.

3. Work is needed to increase OUSET's income to reach more students. This is included in the Association's plans for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
4. Continue to improve and better advertise the Peer Support Service, including exploring Supporters' involvement in the Association's Individual Representation work.
5. I would like to see the Association continue to improve its accessibility.
6. Tutors can mark emTMAs early if a student submits a draft version before the deadline, unlike EMAs which tutors cannot mark early. More conversations with the OU are needed to see if a way can be found so students can submit draft emTMAs without them being marked before the deadline.
7. Continue conversations with the OU about what has been learnt from the changes to assessment that were introduced as a result of COVID.
8. Work with others on the Association's Student Submission to the Office for Students on the OU's APP (Access and Participation Plan)
9. Try to improve the OU's availability of online tutorial recordings.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

I strive to make a positive difference in everything I do. This includes putting the student perspective at numerous OU meetings, talking about online matters at Service Review meetings that I chair, responding to students on Facebook, and supporting the Peer Support Service and OUSET. OU staff regularly meet me and either Patrice (VP EDI) or Cin (VP Education). Issues raised in those meetings have included delays in receiving alternative formats and delays in hearing if Discretionary Postponement requests were accepted. Both have improved in recent times.

The Association can help students in many ways, so it is useful if OU staff spread the word about what's available. Cin and I have provided information for Staff tutors and presented about the Association to a Board of Study and to PLAs (Personal Learning Advisors). We are members of the PLA Reference Group and we regularly meet with PLAs so they can better inform their students what the Association offers.

Cin and I asked the OU to improve information and support for students who receive a Pending or option for a Viva Voce and were told information should improve. We appreciate this can be an anxious time for students and information can help relieve that anxiety.

Students told me that studying more than one module needed flexibility, specific study skills, and wherever possible that assessments and tutorials did not overlap, especially for modules which are often studied together. I passed this on to the OU and CCRs (Central Committee Reps).

#### What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

The most tangible achievement is probably the Study Tips PDF, available on the Students Association website, which was created as a result of me requesting students to send their tips in. Although I put in quite a bit of work collating the tips and dividing them into various sections, it was definitely a team effort. I am extremely grateful to the students who sent in the tips and the help from Association staff across different teams. Heather from the Digital Communications Team helped with advertising and collecting the tips. Ellie from Volunteering and Representation and Sammi in EDI and Student Welfare helped with proofreading and producing the finished product.

From an everyday perspective my most significant achievement will always be reducing stress for students. That might be getting students answers from OU staff, signposting them to the information, posting responses, or ensuring the OU hear about issues and address them if possible. Examples of reducing stress include responding to students who need information about funding or how to find and complete the Special Circumstances forms. It might also be approving an application for funding to OUSET or ensuring the Peer Supporters have what they need to help students. If I hear back from a student I have helped, it brightens up my day.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

It is always difficult to pick out one aspect, whether it is the most challenging or the most exciting. Ever since being elected VP Student Support I have been proud of, and excited by, the Peer Supporters. I oversee this service, which involves trying to improve it, making life as easy as possible for Supporters and when needed (which is very rare) sourcing answers if it is requested by a Supporter.

Supporters respond to one off queries from students and can offer one to one support throughout their module. They have a rota and make sure at least one Supporter is available between 9am and 9pm, usually every day of the year. They are the unsung heroes of the Association in my opinion because they do all this anonymously. Very few people know their actual names, so they maybe don't receive the same recognition that other volunteers do.

This service could not operate without the quiet and organized work of Association staff who make up PS Administration. This has mainly been taken on by Anna Mahon and Verity Robinson during this term.

Therefore, a huge thank you to the Peer Supporters, PS Admin and members of the Association's Volunteering and Representation staff team, especially Nicky, who help train and recruit new Supporters.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

The most challenging times resulted from COVID, including extra stress experienced by students, changes introduced by the OU, and the increased number of Pendlings. Of current importance is that upcoming changes the OU is making are in the students' interest and students are informed about them. The OU seems to have communications in hand and I am included in discussions about this.

I, along with other reps, contacted various OU staff to make them aware when we saw a negative impact on students due to COVID or the introduced changes, especially about online / remote exams. I responded to students on Facebook and signposted them to the COVID page on the Help Centre and to information about mental health and wellbeing.

Lack of face-to-face meetings has been positive and negative. I could attend more meetings and contribute on an equal footing because all meetings have been online since March 2020. If I attended meetings remotely before March 2020 most other attenders were there in person so online attendance was less effective.

The negatives around holding everything online is the impact this has on relationships. Online only meetings probably made team building amongst the whole CEC more difficult. I would have had a far more difficult time since August 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 if it had not been for the tremendous help and support I have received from Verity Robinson, Head of EDI and Student Welfare. It has been a difficult term and without her support I might not have remained in post.

# OU Student member of Council

## Danielle Smith

### **Duration of Office**

Elected November 2020, end of term July 2022

### **What did you set out to achieve when you joined the C E C?**

With regards to my role on the OU Council, I wanted to carry on the good work of my predecessors by ensuring that the Student Voice remained strongly represented and heard at the highest level of the OU. Although my responsibility as a member of Council is to ensure the good legal and financial governance of the OU as a business, and to receive assurances that the OU is meeting all of its statutory or regulatory requirements, decisions that are made at Council often affect students either directly or indirectly and it's important that Council hear and understand how decisions can affect students and what the student body might be saying about them. I see this as a key part of my role.

In terms of the Association, this is a time of reflection and change. We have all lived through the most unprecedented times in recent history and this has affected how we live and work, but also how we interact as students. As a member of the last C E C (England Area Rep), I was part of the culture review which revealed that there was still work to do on getting the Association to where we truly want it to be. When I was elected, I wanted to be a part of that work, and to contribute to the development of an improved Association that absolutely lives and embodies its values every day.

### **What have you achieved so far in your role?**

It's fair to say that the role of the Student Member of Council is less student facing than some of our other elected roles, and the things I've achieved and have been involved in have not necessarily been visible to students.

However, that doesn't mean to say I've been resting on my laurels! Here are some of the things I've achieved in the last year since my election:

I've been part of the elections review group which has considered how we might update and improve the Students Association elections process. We have proposed a series of improvements to the C E C which have been considered and discussed and will be incorporated into the ongoing work in relation to the Governance Reforms.

I've participated in two working groups aimed at delivering strands of the Students Association Strategy including the development of the new communications strategy.

As the Student Member of Council and an ex-officio member of the Senate, I've had direct involvement in the development of the new Open University strategy which has just been approved at the November 2021 meeting of Council and will be published shortly.

At every meeting of Council and Senate since my election I've made sure to speak up and ensure that students are kept at the forefront of many decisions being made by the University. Earlier this year, the President and I co-signed a letter to Council on behalf of the Student's Association expressing our disappointment at the postponement of the implementation of the new Associate Lecturer's contract and our concerns over how this would affect students.

I've also had the opportunity to jointly present updates to Council on behalf of the Student's Association alongside the President. These updates give a brief overview of our activities and how we are meeting our strategic aims. Council always receives these updates with great pleasure and are impressed by the volume of work that goes on to create a vibrant and engaging student community.

**What else will you achieve by the end of your term?**

I'm proud to represent the Student Voice and will continue doing so with passion and enthusiasm until the end of my term in July 2022. I will continue to ensure student interests are kept at the forefront of University decision making.

During 2021, I started thinking how I might bring Council closer to the student body as many students don't know who Council are and what they do. Unfortunately, due to conflicting pressure from my day job in the NHS and the ongoing impact of the pandemic, I was unable to take this any further at the time, however I hope to be able to develop this idea further and deliver on it before the end of term (variants and Covid waves permitting!)

**How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of "making a positive difference for all OU students"?**

Whilst my role isn't as directly visible to students as some of our other roles, all the work I have been involved in has, in some way, contributed to this mission. Whether it's undertaking a project as part of a working group tasked with delivering an element of the Students Association strategy, to proposing a revamped elections process or ensuring I speak up at Senate or Council on a matter that potentially impacts students and getting the OU to consider points that might not have been considered previously, everything



ultimately has an impact for students and helps to make a positive difference even though they might not individually notice it.

**What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?**

Being part of the development of the OU's new strategy has been a really interesting part of the role which started just as I was elected. At various stages along the way there have been workshops and development days which I've participated in, and the Council has received regular updates on the progression of the document. It's been so gratifying to see that students have been widely consulted on the development of this document and that our feedback and suggestions have been taken on board and incorporated into the document. I'm really proud to have contributed to this strategy which sets out a vision for the future of the OU over the next five years aimed at ensuring students are supported in their study goals and they can all achieve success, whatever that might look like to them.

**What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?**

My first Council meeting, which was held just over 2 weeks after I was elected, was a pretty exciting thing for me personally. I had a lot of admin to do beforehand, getting up to speed on different matters. I'd been a member of Senate previously in my role as a Central Committee Representative, but Council is a different kettle of fish altogether as it is responsible for the actual running of the OU as a business, reviewing the annual accounts, pension schemes and business plans among many other issues.

It's been a learning curve in so many ways, having to learn new terminology and understand complex regulatory requirements. I've always been confident in my ability to carry out the role, otherwise I wouldn't have stood for election, but when you're sitting in a meeting with the most senior people in the OU and notable figures from the world of business, it can be somewhat daunting. However, it's been an absolute joy to be part of this

committee and to bring the Student Voice alive alongside our President as well as gaining much valued skills and knowledge that will serve me well long after my term has ended.

**What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?**

Indirectly – my day job. Aside from volunteering for the Students Association, I have a full-time job in the NHS and as many of you will know, it has been and continues to be an extremely busy and pressured time for all healthcare staff. An increased workload plus taking on additional shifts supporting the delivery of the Covid19 vaccine, has meant that I have not been as available as I would have liked to have been or able to participate in some additional projects that have been run. However, I'm extremely grateful to my fellow C E C members who have been very understanding and supportive during the periods where I've been less available.

# Faculty Association Representative (FBL)

## Gareth Jones

Been in office since 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020

1.

When standing for the role of FAR, I had three key priorities based around:

- Communication – This focussed around being the conduit for the students studying within FBL, the faculty and the Association. To achieve this, I planned on being visible to students, allowing them to get in touch with me as and when required, as well as building key relationships with those within the faculty to ensure that issues and initiatives reach the right people.
- Collaboration – I wanted to ensure that the team of student representatives covering the faculty were able to work as a cohesive, efficient and effective team. I wanted to achieve this by encouraging a wider range of volunteers to take on additional responsibilities, where applicable, putting different faces in different places. Additionally I wanted to ensure that communication channels existed for reps within the faculty and between other FAR's.
- Consistency – This recognised a disjointed approach taken by the faculty to how it approached different student needs where the situation was the same/similar, often resulting in different levels of student satisfaction. I wished to take the approach of both highlighting the consequences of this and sharing best practice from within the faculty and externally.

2.

So far, I believe that significant progress has been made in the following areas:

- Widening the range of voices heard – Within the faculty, I have managed to ensure that different students have the opportunity to make an impact, instead of reliance on a small number of students to be in everything. Over my term so far, I have managed to diversify the voices heard in the Business School reaccreditation process; peer-mentoring project leadership roles; the faculties scholarship student advisory panel; increased opportunities to attend student huddles through the invitation of societies and observers; and the introduction of the observers at Faculty Assembly initiative, which has recently been confirmed as permanent feature within FBL.
- Students as partners in the creation process of new modules and qualifications – Across the faculty, students now attend workshops that directly feed into the design process of new modules and qualifications, a practice that was shared at Student Voice Week as an exemplar for student engagement.
- Prominence to students – In this area, I have managed to remain consistently available to students through a wide variety of channels. Whilst this often proves time-consuming, it does mean that students do recognise that they have a voice in discussion and a point of contact for support if needed.

3.

One key responsibility that I currently have on behalf of the Students Association, and ultimately students, is being the student representative on the Associate Lecture Contract Implementation Board. Having joined this reformed board following the furore created in the Spring 2021 with regards the delayed implementation of the new contract, I have been heavily involved in the oversight and scrutiny of the process to ensure this completed ahead of the new deadline of August 2022.

I would also like to help the Association develop to become more agile and proactive when it comes to the development and response to issues as they

arise. Despite knowing that work is occurring behind the scenes on behalf of students when issues arise, I feel it is important that students are aware of this in a timely manner, and I look forward to helping establish an efficient working process for the Position Statement working group in the Association.

I am also looking to further imbed some of the success that I have achieved over the term so far, by solidifying some of the initiatives that I have helped instigate with the faculty and preparing a seamless transition for my successor.

4.

I feel that a lot of the work that I do is helping to make a positive difference to all OU Students, but some specific examples that come to mind include:

- Involvement on the newly created presentation readiness group which has oversight of our the OU and the individual faculties are progressing in the preparations for the next presentation. This group aims to consider a wide variety of workstreams that come together to provide the student with as seamless as experience as can be achieved, and hopefully students have recognised a better process this year than last year and will continue to see improvements.
- Engagement in assignment timetable mapping – One key area of focus for me in the design workshops I attend is whether any thought has been given to the workload of students studying multiple modules, and whether any high-stress points around assignment deadline day can be reduced through better planning across module teams. This has led to clashes being avoided, or a change in assessment approach to help the student.

5.

Co-leading the design, organisation and facilitation of the October 2021 FBL AL Student Conference has been the highlight of what I feel has been a very enjoyable term to date so far. The Conference pulled together so many different aspects of the wider role into one event, allowing me to build on my contacts with the faculty, OU, Students Association and students to pull off what was ultimately a very successful and well received conference.

This Conference was months in the making, and the secondment of a member of staff who would normally have led in this area meant that it resulted in a significant amount of work to pull it off, however, I do believe that we were able to provide the student and AL attendees with an enjoyable two days and we have put in place firm foundations to build on for next time.

I will also add, the feeling of relief as the last session of the Conference was drawing to a close was immense. It truly felt like a weight was being lifted as the minutes ticked by.

6.

The most exciting aspect of this role is, without-a-doubt, seeing the difference that you can make. All too often, work is undertaken without seeing the outcome, but actually being able to have a student come to you, often at the end of their tether, and resolve an issue is extremely satisfying, whilst also providing you impetus to stop that issue from reoccurring in the future.

I will also mention another area, which I have alluded to already, which gave me enormous satisfaction, and that is when observers went on to become CCR's. It was really nice to see the work that went into the observer initiative ultimately result in two observers going on to become CCR's. Whilst this initiative was primarily designed to 'draw back the curtain', it was really nice to see them inspired to apply after having a small taste of it.

7.

I don't think it can be underestimated just how much of an impact the pandemic has had on the role of student representatives. Whilst the most obvious change is that everything is now conducted via a laptop screen, ultimately this has had both positive and negative consequences. The ability to be spaces and conversations has increased dramatically, allowing us to attend the short meetings which would have occurred on campus without student involvement because it would have been impractical to attend campus for a 30-minute meeting. This has allowed us to ensure that the student voice is more embedded than ever.

However, the downside of this is that our workload has now increased substantially as we try to ensure that the opportunity to put our foot in the door because of the pandemic is not spurned. We are now engaging in more meetings, sometimes multiple meetings daily, which just would not have occurred previously, and if this is to become the norm, then we need to evaluate the role remits and how volunteers can be supported better. We don't want to not be in the spaces where we can be effective, but we also need to avoid burning out our volunteers too.

# Faculty Association Representative (WELS)

## Nichola Connolly

### **Duration of Office**

Nearly 5 months

### **What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?**

I wanted to represent all students within the faculty and schools within WELS. To be a conduit between students, The Students Association and The University on matters that affect students and that are important to students. To be involved in the decision making at all levels and making sure that the student voice was heard in all spaces of The Association and University. I wanted to see positive changes made especially around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion matters that affect and are important to students. A change that has improved has been the alternative formats, although not perfect there has been a significant change this year in the way alternative formats is distributed which has lessened the impact for students.

### **What have you achieved so far in your role?**

So far in my role I have achieved organising, planning and hosting a successful fresher's event for all WELS students. Feedback from students that attended the event enquired if it was a regular event. Based on that there are plans to make the WELS drop in a regular event from January. Other achievements to date have been organising, planning and co-hosting a successful end of year/post results celebration event for all students that seemed to be enjoyed by all that attended. I was interviewed by the



University in August, about students views of what new tutors needed to know for the induction of new tutors which was a privilege to be involved in. I also became an accessibility EDI champion, attending regular meetings about what is important in EDI matters and working with the APS team on this vital work. I have also attended Faculty Assembly and Teaching Committee for WELS, being able to get the student voice heard in these spaces around teaching and learning that matters to students and attending the teaching excellence day where tutors and students who had been nominated for inspirational awards had awarded them. Furthermore, I co-hosted several student voice sessions throughout November in collaboration with staff at the University. There was an opportunity for me to be part of the staff recruitment process to appoint an ECYS staff tutor, I was part of a student panel and was valued as a member of the panel, and the student voice was an important element of the staff recruitment process and vital in hearing the views of students as to making the decision on who to appoint. Currently I am collaborating with other members of the CEC to organise, plan and co-host a Christmas event.

**What else will you achieve by the end of your term**

Hoping to have achieved more student engagement, more awareness of the Students Association and what we offer to students. Also, to have made positive changes to what matters to students around equality, diversity and inclusion and to build on what I have already achieved. I would also like to have achieved getting more underrepresented students involved in the community and what we do at the Students Association

**How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?**

By attending relevant meetings within the governance structure at the University such as Faculty Assembly and Teaching Committee so that all

students are represented to be able to have positive student voice heard at all levels as well as making positive changes and decisions for all students.

**What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far**

Being able to host the WELS drop in at freshers was a great achievement as it enabled me to hear from students from all three schools within the faculty as to what was important to them going forward and what they expected from me as their Faculty Association Rep for WELS. Based on feedback from the students I am planning to host a regular monthly WELS drop in.

**What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far**

Being able to make connections with volunteers, other members of the CEC and students and represent students on matters at the University that are important to them. Having the opportunity to be on committees whereby the student voice is heard in all aspects of the Association and the University and that I can make a difference and be involved in decision making at the highest level has been one of the most exciting aspects of my role so far.

**What has inspired you? What's given you a real buzz? Why?**

My inspirations have come from interacting with students and representing them in important issues. Although I have not been in role for that long interacting with students and having the students in mind and the heart of what I do in my role has been the biggest inspiration of all. Hearing from students and gaining feedback of what is important to students and what they want from me as their Faculty Association Rep for WELS has been a highlight of my role.

**What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far**

Throughout the pandemic there have been challenges in the way I wanted to represent students. Moving everything online has been challenging at times as it has been difficult to reach out to as many students as I would have liked

to. Not being able to connect with students in person has been challenging at times as it is easier to connect and build relationships with students in person than virtually. However, although challenging having some aspects online has meant that The Association has been able to reach more students that may not have been able to make face to face events for instance international students.

# Faculty Association Representative (FASS)

## Beverley Smit

### Duration of Office

I have been in office since November 2020

### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

Before I stood for election, I had been a volunteer with the Association for several years. I sat on Board of Studies for Arts and Humanities and was a member of Senate Reference Group. I had hosted face to face meet ups in Birmingham and helped at Graduation Ceremonies and I knew that getting the views of students was important. My aim was simple, to get the opinions and views of students heard, and to try and form a community so that students in the faculty could get involved and feel included, and to let them know I was there for them.

### What have you achieved so far in your role?

When I was elected, I had visions of myself going around the country to visit students at their various meet ups to let them know what was going on and to hear what they had to say, and to take their voices back to various committees to ensure they were heard. Unfortunately, with Covid restrictions in place this wasn't possible. However, I have been hosting a monthly FASS drop in where students can come along to hear what's happening in the faculty and raise any concerns they may have. It's always good to hear different points of views from other students.

I have been involved with an EDI working group to create student awards. It was lovely to see the Joan Armatrading and the Lenny Henry awards

presented (although virtually) to two students at the Faculty Assembly Meeting in November. Faculty Assembly is also the chance for student observers to attend the meeting and I have been able to invite students along to both meetings I've attended so far.

I have also raised the support that SiSE students have when leaving prison. I'm glad to say that after talking to student support they have undertaken to offer more support to these students. There are initiatives in the pipeline, and this is a work in progress but hopefully I will have more to say about this in the months to come.

In a meeting with the FASS student support team, I mentioned that the study with me group on Facebook was really popular and they have now added it to the FASS student support forum. This lets students' study together to break the sense of isolation that some feel while studying alone. Especially during lockdown when coffee shops and libraries were closed.

The two FASS Speak Easy's that were held were a real success. I can't really take credit for the idea, (this was the previous reps baby) but I was involved with the planning and hosted the event along with Billy Docherty and members of staff. (Special thanks are due to Jo Durward who organized it all.) This was a chance for students to meet the senior staff team and ask questions. Originally it was intended to happen face to face and around the four nations. Again, because of COVID 19 it had to be held on line, but hopefully once things return to normal the speak easy events will happen face to face and it will be a great opportunity for students to put names to faces.

Fresher events and Student voice weeks have also given me the opportunity to meet students and are a real opportunity to share the association values.

I have also raised general issues that have arisen and raised the student voice in meetings. These have included: pending results, issues with adobe

connect, late delivery of alternate materials and a host of other issue too. I have moderated a faculty student consultation about flexible intensity study and this was a real chance to hear the views of students studying full time.

What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

Between now and August 2022 my biggest hope is that covid restrictions are lifted so that I can actually meet some of the students face to face.

I would like to think that from the one small question I asked about SiSe students we will have a great support team in place by the time my term ends. There are plans to hep with IT availability and learning and making them part of the student community.

I'm also looking forward to taking part in some of the events for the Association's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, celebrating another milestone in the association's history.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

I think that I'm helping to achieve the Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU students' by trying to represent all students at all times. At meetings I attend I raise issues which I think will have a negative impact on students.. I think I'm approachable so that any student who has issues can reach out to me and hopefully I can get the problem solved or pass it to someone who can. I've been approached by students who have had problems with pending results, issues with adobe connect, module registration, discretionary postponements and a host of other problems student have encountered. Sometimes it's just a case of giving information, sometimes it needs to be passed on to someone in the faculty, but by being there I hope I've made a positive difference.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far? (

I'm not sure I have one significant achievement. I think if I've helped a student with a problem however small, that's an achievement in itself. My own personal achievement as a volunteer is gaining confidence to speak up for those who need it. Not only for students but in my own local community too. And on a lighter note...I have managed to stop the dog emptying the kitchen bin during my meetings, (he thinks he's getting ignored) by giving him treats. Needless to say after a trip to the vets for a check up he's on a diet.!

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

I've loved the whole aspect of the role. From meeting senior staff and discussing faculty issues to working with a great team of other Faculty reps in organizing social online activities. Hearing students say they feel as though they belong gives me a buzz and makes me feel as though I have made a little bit of difference.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

I think the most challenging moments have been not being able to meet other students and reps face to face as I would have liked. However I'm an optimist, and although this wasn't possible we have had some great meet ups on line, where we have laughed and talked about all sorts, As well as the more serious stuff. It would have been nice to meet other members of staff face to face too, but although not ideal, the online meetings have worked well overall.

## Faculty Association Representative (STEM)

### Stephanie Stubbins

#### Duration of Office

I haven't been in the role long; I was co-opted to start on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2021 [so have been in the role 13 days at the time of writing this report].

#### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

I want to represent STEM students, listen to their views, ideas, and concerns, and take their student voice to the relevant areas within the University to positively impact decision-making.

I aim to build links with the STEM faculty, creating a two-way communication channel to filter student voice through to the OU while feeding back to students.

I will work as part of the CEC leadership team to improve the student experience for OU students, while supporting the individual and collective work of the CEC.

#### What have you achieved so far in your role?

I attended my first CEC weekend from 3rd-4th December 2021 and completed the Student Rep Training Weekend, which was from 10th-12th December 2021. I had several induction sessions with OU Student Association staff members and individual catch-up sessions with some CEC members, which helped me feel more prepared to start this role.



I made initial contact with eSTeEM Scholarship Centre, STEM Communications and Engagement Department and the STEM Executive Dean to introduce myself as the new Student Association STEM FAR. The STEM Communications and Engagement Officer approached me to write an article in the Faculty Newsletter about my new role, which went out on the 6th December 2021. Since then, I have been contacted by different STEM Faculty departments and have meetings set up in December 2021 and in the new year.

I had some STEM related queries and work passed on to me by other student reps, and have spent time in CEC Teams and forum areas catching up on the work they have been working on over the last 16 months.

STEM students contacted me about some issues they faced, and most were signposted to relevant areas that could help them. I contacted the School of Computing and Communications about an unresolved issue raised by level 1 students, which gave me the opportunity to talk to the Head of Computing and Communications School and the module team.

What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

I am involved with ChrimboOU with other AAR's and FAR's, and will be co-hosting a Christmas Quiz. I am planning a STEM Freshers event in the New Year and will be looking at other ways to engage with STEM students during the rest of my term.

I plan to contact the other 5 Schools within the STEM Faculty (Engineering and Innovation; Environment, Earth, and Ecosystems; Life, Health and Chemical Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics; Physical Sciences) to initiate a working relationship with them.

I will be meeting monthly with the other FAR's to share ideas and information. I am also looking forward to working with the Student Experience Links and Central Committee Representatives on STEM Committees.

I have meetings with:

- Nicholas Braithwaite - Executive Dean in STEM
- Andrew Potter - Deputy Associate Dean (Academic Excellence) to discuss student voice within STEM.
- Diane Butler - Associate Dean (Academic Excellence) STEM, Life, Health & Chemical Science
- Trevor Collins - Senior Research Fellow, Diane Ford - Senior manager (Scholarship) and Nick Hook (eSTEEem Centre Support) to talk about eSTEEem Scholarship Centre.
- Katrina Bray - Communications & Engagement Manager in STEM Deanery
- Katie Weeds - Senior Careers and Employability Consultant (STEM)
- Afua Acheampong - Manager; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in STEM,
- Paul Collier - Senior Manager (Student Success) STEM

- Victoria Nicholas - Associate Dean (Academic Excellence) Student Experience

I am on the following working groups:-

- Higher Technical Qualifications Implementation Group
- Survey Systems Refresh Project Task and Finish Group
- Careers and Employability Service Student Voice Group

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

I have raised student issues and taken student constructive feedback to relevant areas within STEM departments, which will positively influence areas of teaching and learning within the faculty.

I have made connections within the STEM Faculty in specific areas, so that I can raise issues and concerns that affect STEM students constructively, while building a working relationship with those departments.

I hope to improve areas around student satisfaction, student success, student experience, EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), teaching and learning, career and employability, and OU communications.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

I am only 2 weeks into my term, but I am pleased with the quick progress I have made within Stem so far. I feel that my previous experience and

knowledge as a volunteer has enabled me to pick up this role quickly, so that I can make the most of the 8 months in this role.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

I have valued the opportunity of induction sessions and the student rep training weekend, alongside my attendance in my first CEC meeting. This has given me some insight, skills, knowledge and confidence to start this role so late in the CEC term. The current CE

C members and other volunteers I have spoken to have been supportive; their passion and enthusiasm in their roles is inspiring!!!

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

The only challenge is knowing that I only have 8 months in this role, which is a very short period to make a significant impact for STEM students.

However, I am a quick learner and lucky enough to have support from other Volunteers and our Student Association staff, which has enabled me to embrace this role and run with it from day 1.

# Faculty Association Representative (Open & Access)

## Lucy Richardson

### Duration of Office

I was elected to this role in the November 2020 bye-election so currently I am approximately 13 months in this role

### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

To keep the Open and Access programs raised at the heart of the University. To work to ensure that as many modules as possible are available to Open students, and that where issues arise, that these are made clear, and made available where possible.

As a four-nation university I will also make sure that the needs of Open and Access students are heard in the nations through co-operation with the relevant Area Association Representatives (AAR).

### What have you achieved so far in your role?

I have set up quarterly meetings with the Open and Access managers. I have worked with the University to improve the application process for Access students. I have secured the continuation of an Open and Access FAR beyond any changes in the culture review. I have worked collaboratively with other FAR's to make sure issues are dealt with in the right place.

What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

As this was a new role, I really wanted to 'gel' the role into place, without stepping on any following reps' toes. It would be nice to know my successor in role has a solid footing and doesn't have to start again from scratch. I would also like to work more on hearing the voices of access students.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

While mostly these kinds of issues occurred on modules owned by faculty's, so I passed them on to other FARs, one example of an issue affecting Open students was when earlier this year 2<sup>nd</sup> year modules were filling up fast due to the previous years massive growth in student numbers. This can mean that when they are on their courses, there can be clashes between compulsory modules and Open students, and in the past Open students have become deprioritized for courses. This has meant that they are unable to take the courses they wish, which can also cause issues with further modules in later years if there are compulsory dependencies, an issue which I raised and have continued to make the Open program staff aware of ensuring this didn't happen this time.

One of the biggest areas I think my role works with is within Teaching Committee and the Senate Reference Group. As much of this work is confidential, I am unable to say much about it here, but it is where I can make the student voice most heard and make the biggest difference to the ongoing roles and effects on the future of all our students learning.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

Whilst I have hosted many community events for the association, I have never had to present before, presenting from a power point presentation or pdf and chairing a session has been a real challenge for me, which is made

more difficult by my mental health issues. Whilst I have now managed this several times, I have also learnt the value of asking another person for help in areas where I struggle.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

The most exciting thing about my role has been embedding it in both the Association and the University. This has included a great deal of collaborative working and compromise as well as achieving some big wins such as videos about the Association being included at Access induction.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

This was when an issue cropped up which I can't name for both confidentiality and legal reasons that caused much heartache for a great many students across all faculties, which caused issues and raised a miasma of mistrust on both sides of the debate and which as a body we are still attempting to resolve for the best good of all students.

## Area Association Representative (England)

### Leanne White

#### Duration of Office

Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2021

#### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

When I first joined the OU I was looking for a community, I saw an advert for an Association drop in which I attended and after seeing the volunteers and their passion for what they were doing I knew I wanted to become a volunteer myself. From then I threw myself into as much as I could, I became a CCR, a member of SRG and a Meet-Up Host. The enjoyment I got out of each of these roles just fueled my hunger for more, knowing I was making a positive difference to the student experience was more rewarding than I had expected, and I knew that to have the maximum amount of impact I wanted to join the CEC.

When I think back to applying to be co-opted as the England AAR, I remember thinking very hard about what I wanted to do in the role. Unfortunately, the Covid 19 Pandemic made it difficult to plan for anything involving being face to face with students and so I had to adjust my pledges to accommodate that. My main two pledges were about community and awareness. In my experience of being in online social spaces with other students, awareness of the Association and what it could offer them was very low. I also noted that students were feeling increasingly isolated because of the ongoing pandemic and so I wanted to help increase the online events and expand the variety to help change that.



### What have you achieved so far in your role?

The first thing I did was to take control of all of the regional social media and forum spaces for student's in England. I spent a lot of time recruiting new admins for them, making them more uniform in terms of rules and joining questions and coming up with new ways to try and increase engagement in them such as hashtag campaigns and "What's On This Week" posts. This is a slow process but the engagement and awareness of the Association for students in England is growing.

Alongside the fortnightly East of England chat I was hosting I have started a monthly England drop in session which can be used as a social or for students to bring any questions to me in an informal way. I find I get most of my questions or enquiries from students through events or social media spaces rather than the more formal email method.

After hosting and being involved in multiple Freshers events (my first in this role), focus switched to student voice week and with the help of VP Engagement and the DigiComms team, I created a video to go out in the "OU and You" Newsletter all about volunteering which was viewable on YouTube.

One of the most interesting things I was involved in was consulting with the community team about the new code of conduct for online events, to help make it more inclusive of certain protected characteristics as well as making it very clear to hosts what is expected of participants. A very valuable piece of work that has now been used in multiple events.

### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

Currently I am working with a group with a plan to instate "Nation's Volunteer Panels" after the success of the Welsh pilot in 2020 it has been decided to create panels for all of the four nations and also continental

Europe with the hope of supporting community building and working with the nation's offices on other projects.

I am also on the 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday Steering Committee and am helping in the planning of celebrations over the full year. It is an exciting project to be a part of and seeing the events and ideas planned for students and staff come to fruition will be incredibly rewarding.

I was recently a part of the Clubs Review Focus Group and hope to be involved in positive changes being made to the running, moderating and engagement in OU Clubs in the next year.

Hopefully by April 2022 we will have made the admin roles in regional and club spaces an official volunteer role.

I am looking forward to helping make Freshers 22B even bigger and better than the last one!

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

I think increasing opportunities for engagement has had a significant impact upon the student experience. There have been students who have experienced intense loneliness during the pandemic and who have come to rely on the community events as a chance to build friendships and keep a sense of belonging. By increasing chances for this connectivity we are making a positive difference for students even in the most difficult of times during the Covid 19 Pandemic.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

I think I am proudest of two things, the first being able to represent the CEC during a Student Hub Live session during Freshers 21J and talk about "finding your way around", shortly after that I made a video supported by VP

Engagement and the DigiComms team all about my experience as a volunteer and about student voice week. Both of these recordings went up on Youtube after the events and have been viewed hundreds of times. This has given me to opportunity to reach more students than ever before and hopefully helped to increase awareness of and engagement with the OU Student's Association.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

Being given the opportunity to sit on many different working groups, committees and task and finish groups has been very inspiring. From Teaching Committee and Senate Reference Group to Academic Representation Task and Finish Group and the Access and Participation Student Submission Working Group. Seeing the work that goes on "behind the scenes" to support students and help reduce attainment gaps, to support volunteers to close the feedback loop and be able to report back and be proud of their achievements.

Also working with other, more seasoned CEC members who have such passion for the roles they carry out, I am inspired to work harder and honoured to be a part of the team.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

The Covid 19 Pandemic has caused frustrations for students across the University, from tutorials moving solely online, exams being made remote and cancelled graduations, not to mention the lockdowns and not being able to visit a simple library or coffee shop for study. One of the biggest issues I have experienced has been student's who are struggling with knowing that we cannot go back to the old ways of face-to-face meetings again. One way we helped to work through this was to create more opportunities to engage online, although Study With Me Club was already created by the time I joined CEC it has definitely been promoted much more and has grown from

strength to strength. The online events calendar has also grown exponentially, with at least one event available almost every night of the week, helping to combat some of the loneliness and isolation felt by those students.

On a more personal level it has been challenging joining the CEC so late in the term and not being able to meet the people you are working with. The team had already melded and I was concerned I might have problems integrating, however the other CEC members were very welcoming and have chosen any opportunity they can to work with me and make me feel connected.

## Area Association Representative (Wales)

### Hanna Silk

Duration of Office:

1 year (August 2021 to July 2022)

How long have you been on the CEC?:

4.5 months at the time of preparing this report

What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

I knew very little about the Association when I was co-opted in August 2021. Having grown in confidence with my studies over the previous two years, I was keen to put myself forward for the opportunity to support and represent fellow students in Wales. At that time my main priority was to get up to speed on everything Open University ('OU') and Open University Students Association ('Association') related hoping to get involved as quickly as possible making a positive difference, supporting others and championing OU study. I was also focussed on ensuring that the views of students in Wales continue to be effectively and fairly represented in OU and Association matters.

I was lucky to inherit my role from a hardworking and passionate student representative and it was important to me to continue with the role in a similarly supportive and inclusive way. I was keen to carry on the hard work of my predecessor in building up engagement in the forums and Facebook as well as continuing to hold regular online monthly meet-ups to enable students in Wales to meet while face to face events are still not an option.

I was keen to use my experience as a new participant with the Association to understand reasons for lack of engagement and promote participation in Association events in the most accessible ways possible.

What have you achieved so far in your role?

I am grateful for the warm welcome and ongoing support in my role and to have had ongoing opportunities to build up a good working relationship with Association staff and fellow members of the CEC. I am really pleased to be working in collaboration with the other Area Reps on projects and information sharing and looking forward to working with Area Reps for Scotland and Ireland once these positions are filled.

Similarly, the OU in Wales has been very welcoming, enabling me to develop a better understanding of the workings of the OU and the OU in Wales. I am grateful for the opportunity to build on a positive working relationship with the Open University in Wales, having met with the senior management team early on in my term and continuing to have monthly meetings with Alayla Castle-Herbert, Policy Officer at OU in Wales. I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to work with the OU in Wales to support, promote and host events for students in Wales during Freshers and Student Voice Week ('SVW') and to have been invited to contribute to recent recruitment processes.

Early in my term I was invited to join the Digital Inclusion: Digital Literacy Skills Task and Finish Group which is currently ongoing. Prior to my involvement with the CEC, the OU Students Manifesto for the Senedd Elections 2021 highlighted the need to eradicate digital exclusion in Wales and I am pleased to be involved in work directly aligned with that key aim to represent issues relating to students in Wales specifically.

What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

In general terms, I hope to have been successful in improving awareness of the work of the Association and the support and opportunities that the

Association offers to students. I hope to achieve this through a visible, approachable and accessible point of contact for all students.

By the end of my term, I hope to have worked with the OU in Wales to raise awareness of the Welsh language, to have promoted opportunities for students to communicate with the OU in Wales through the medium of Welsh and streamlined the process for translation so that Association comms for Students in Wales is bilingual and the process is standardised for future Wales reps. Ideally, I would also like to see this bilingual messaging developed to be rolled out to all communications but appreciate the need to take account of time and financial implications.

Students have made it clear that meeting others and socialising is a priority and I therefore hope to have established well-attended monthly online meet-ups by way of evening meetings, coffee mornings and book club. In promoting these events, I hope to reach out to more students in Wales to share information about the benefits of being involved with the Association and to go some way to alleviate some of the loneliness and isolation felt by distance learners. I hope to have been able to generate a strong sense of community among Students in Wales and an interest in establishing regional meet-up groups hosted by students from the region in the hope that these will form a solid basis for establishing face to face meet-ups in the future.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

### **Inform and Support**

A key aspect of my role is to represent the specific interests of students in Wales. In addition to this, I hope to continue working collaboratively and positively with the whole student leadership team to increase awareness of the Association. I hope to make a positive contribution by informing all students of the services, resources and support available to them, using a range of communication methods to extend the range of the message. So far I have sought to achieve this by:

\* developing a good understanding of the work of the Association, the OU and OU in Wales as well as other key institutions and individuals

\*working on getting to know the staff and other members of the leadership team, to understand how the Association functions and to understand how best I can contribute and collaborate with others to work towards making a difference for all OU students

\* establishing a good working relationship with the OU in Wales and working together to identify and address key issues for students in Wales and students generally including students mental health and provision for Welsh-speaking students

\*reaching out to students via social media (including SVW OU in Wales Twitter Takeover), Students in Wales newsletter, articles in The Hoot, OU forums, Freshers and SVW events.

### **Engage and Involve**

(See above)

Also, reaching out to the student community and acting on feedback to provide a range of opportunities to support engagement including:

\*Working in collaboration with my fellow Area Reps to organise and promote the current OU Festive Bake Off competition for all OU students

\* February 2022 launch of the monthly coffee mornings to run alongside the existing monthly evening meet-ups

\*2022 launch of the Students in Wales Book Club which will have provision for contributions and discussions via the Forum to allow for engagement at convenient times for students.



\*2022 launch of the 'My Place in Wales' photography competition to encourage engagement and giving students the opportunity to connect with others and identify the potential to establish regional connections

### **Influence and Transform**

I aim to reach out to as many students as possible through a variety of communication methods and to act quickly on feedback and suggestions. I strive to uphold the values of the Association in my role and in doing so encourage and empower others to get involved in the decisions that impact their student experience. I feel privileged to have been co-opted into my role and I take my responsibilities as a student representative seriously in my work with the Association, the OU and other stakeholders.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

I faced my tech fears to co-host the OU in Wales Twitter Takeover during Student Voice Week. This was a great opportunity to raise awareness of SVW, the experience of being an OU student, to reach out to students, stakeholders and the wider public. It was a positive and fun collaboration between the OU in Wales and us as student volunteers with the Association. It was also a great opportunity to celebrate the Welsh language through bilingual Tweets; attempting an intro video in both languages and encouraging others to try speaking Welsh.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

One of the most exciting aspects of my role so far has been the opportunity to engage directly with students through hosting our monthly online meet-ups as well as events during Freshers and Student Voice Week. These are opportunities to carefully plan and promote events, engage with others and to share ideas for events and projects moving forwards which have been rewarding and great fun.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

At times it has been challenging to balance my volunteer role with my studies and family commitments, particularly given the ongoing uncertainty due to Covid. I faced a massive learning curve at the start of my role at a time when my EMA was due and the children were still on school holidays and this was overwhelming at times. Going from almost two years of distance learning with limited interaction with others to a role within the student leadership team and the related technical side with Teams meetings etc. was a massive change and has taken some time to adjust to. That said, I think my experience so far aligns with the experience of a lot of students and helps me to better understand the challenges that students face in their studies as well as the potential barriers to engagement with the Student Association and the OU. I hope that this will help me to carry out my role in an understanding, inclusive and open way.

## Area Association Representative (Continental Europe)

### Kate Wells

#### Duration of Office

Since July 2021

#### What did you set out to achieve when you joined the CEC?

When I applied to join the CEC as the Area Representative for Continental Europe it was because I wanted to grow the international OU community of students, and because I feel that as students not based in the UK (or Ireland) we need a voice speaking for our specific requirements, and issues.

#### What have you achieved so far in your role?

The highlight of my role so far is meeting so many fantastic people, my fellow international students, volunteers, the other members of the leadership team and the OUSA staff. I've enjoyed taking part in the Website Working Group, and am looking forward to participating in the future Nation Volunteer Panels. The other area representatives and I are, at the time of writing, looking forward to virtually tasting the cakes made for the #OUFestiveBakeOff, which we hope will have numerous entries.

#### What else will you achieve by the end of your term?

I would like to continue to reach out to the student community, the way that this happens for the international community will need to be re-visited. The area is too vast to be managed by one volunteer. I would like to start the process of bringing together the students onto one platform, as having a multitude of platforms (e.g. the OU fora, Facebook, Twitter), disperses the opportunities for making contact, and multiplies the work of the volunteers. I am also looking forward to Conference, and the 50th anniversary celebrations, and hope to share my enthusiasm with the rest of the international student community.

How are you helping to achieve the Students Association's mission of 'making a positive difference for all OU Students'?

I am helping to achieve this mission by trying to establish a community of international students, or perhaps several smaller communities who can come together to share ideas and issues on a regular basis. I also participate on the SQE Learning Design panel, and Law course design panel.

What has been your most significant achievement during your term so far?

Being part of the CEC has been interesting, exciting and challenging, I look forward to continuing to grow through this participation.

What has been the most exciting aspect of your role so far?

I have very much enjoyed meeting the other overseas students, understanding a little of how the CEC is organised, and the important role it plays in the lives of students.

What has been the most challenging moment of your role so far?

Understanding the depth and breadth of the role, and how I can bring my experience to bear in the quest to build a student community for such geographically disparate students.

