OU Students Association Senate Reference Group

Before finding out more about the OU Students Association Senate Reference Group, you need to know about Senate!

Senate

This is the academic authority of the Open University which meets four times each year to consider business which relates to the academic work of the University both in teaching and research. There are currently over 100 members of Senate including six student members who are decided by the Association:

- President
- VP Education
- One member of CEC appointed by the President
- Three students appointed on behalf of the Board of Trustees

All OU students have access to the Senate minutes once they are published.

OU Students Association Senate Reference Group

To help the six student members of Senate prepare for each of their meetings the OU Students Association Senate Reference Group (known colloquially as SRG) was convened.

The purpose of SRG is to act in an advisory capacity to the ‘Senate 6’ and to provide a face to face opportunity in which they are able to draw on the diversity of circumstances, views and opinions of other students.

Currently SRG has a membership of 40 student places. SRG meets on campus in Milton Keynes before each Senate meeting to consider the business papers and the members also have discussions in between meetings in their own forum. At the meetings the members discuss as many papers as time allows with VP Education taking the Chair. The interesting discussions generate a large amount of information and opinions which the Senate 6 then consider in a separate meeting in between the SRG meeting and Senate—yes they do have a very busy day! They clarify exactly what they might want to raise at Senate but they are not mandated to take the views of SRG—the role of SRG is purely advisory.

Read on to find out what happened at the most recent SRG meeting and how you can be more involved.
3 April 2019

These notes are intended as a taste of the SRG meeting and not a detailed record.

The main discussion papers were:

**Academic Performance Report**

A regular report to Senate. The discussion included:

Although raised at January SRG, members are still receiving black and white copies of the report and would prefer colour.

Dynamic and inclusive culture – working with students is important, some measure of student engagement should form part of this.

Suitability – post graduate student numbers are down, which possible has something to do with the fees.

Student Satisfaction is also down and there were discussions around the benchmark for this against specific institutions.

NSS results for student recruitment has improved compared to recent years, but we have decreasing numbers of students succeeding in OU Study. Student success rates measured under ‘modules passed at first attempt’ is decreasing and this could be affected by poor marketing. As this is a strategic objective for the OU then this is a worrying percentage.

The ‘More students qualifying’ initiative has been replaced by student success which is a broader measure relating to student expectations. In the worst modules, completion rates are in the 30% range, and even though faculties know this could be seen as miss-selling to students and not being honest. Students don’t see pass rates after their first hurdles with TMAs

How do the engagement figures (78%) compare across the sector? Some of this comes into the TEF metrics, and the OU basically defines this metric for PT learners as the OU makes up that market which makes comparisons against other providers difficult. One of things we should be wary of – is a deliberate dumbing down of Level One so they have better progression to level 2 and subsequent difficulties due to increased complexity of curriculum content.

Futurelearn and Openlearn should be pushed more to prepare students for their level 1 study.

Some students coming in at level 2 – over level 1, D200 has a big drop out. Over the last three to four years, OU has done a lot as to how to induct students in the Open University in order for potential students to get used to study – however students are not using this nor do they access the good information on the study and subject qualification sites also. IT inductions to OU systems might also be useful.

Experience of coming to the OU as an access module, it’s too much information at the beginning, signposting is not done well though. There needs to be materials and sample assignments, to support if it is about comprehension of written material – or about critical thinking.
Student might have mixed feelings about doing an induction course if it is not credit bearing or too time consuming. No one goes and does a deep dive in Student Home, and students are bombarded with Student Emails.

**C2 Associate Lecturer Contract**

Issue of Student Representation on the Working Group for implementing the contract. This was later raised at Senate and the Deputy VC agreed that there should be student representation.

In some of these things, there is a voluntary severance scheme – there is a potential for there to have a lack of tutors which has a direct impact on students, especially as they study all year around.

Concern that in the risk analysis that there is a risk of losing tutors due to the change of role, in council mins – there was an intention to have more staff tutors rather than fewer. Students need to be kept informed about the changes.

Staff Tutor and the role of the AL – is there confusion about who does the role. Should they reassess the AL workload?

**C3 Review of Academic Staff Promotion Scheme**

No comments

**C4 Appointment Procedure for Heads of School**

Does internal selection give the best candidate for the position? Discussion around maintaining the same standards as an external appointment.

Is this a short term appointment, 3 years with the option to extend 3+2+2 for a maximum of 7 years? Reappointment after this would be exceptional

Students will be members of the Appointments panel, A question was asked about how students going to be recruited and trained for that position? Where do these students come from? Either via the Association or selected by the University. There is a risk of the same faces who do the same things over and over, and some students are excluded by the Association.

**C5 Annual Effectiveness Review**

This is an oral report given at senate so no comments made at SRG.

Comments from the Senate 6:

Barbara: raise how pleased we are that the institutional performance report states that 91% of qualifiers are happy that the OU is helping them achieve their personal study goals.

Danielle: on dynamic and inclusive culture, this should define a measure for student engagement.

Peter: PG loans as a barrier to the numbers, specifically the scheduling of payment against the receipt of loans.

Alison: Will raise that there should be measures appropriate to reducing the attainment gap.
Alison: on para 13, will student representatives be able to access this new institutional performance dashboard?

**D2 The Council**

Relationship agreement were agreed formally – two item are crucial – The Sharing agreement and the second one was the expenses for meetings where it was put in for reasonable expenses is part of this. Remote attendance is at the request of the students.

That’s all for April SRG!

Interested to find out more?

If you would like to get involved with SRG by reading more about the roles available and how to apply then the Association would be very pleased to hear from you by emailing Student-Voice-Team@open.ac.uk