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. Senate normally meets face to face, but the latest meeting was via Skype for Business.

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 of our Central Committee Representatives, appointed by the President and VP Education.

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 can draw on the diversity of circumstances, views and opinions of other students.

Currently SRG has a membership of 40 student places. SRG usually meets on campus in Milton Keynes before each Senate meeting to consider the business papers and have discussions in between meetings in their own forum. At the meetings the members discuss as many papers as time allows. 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.

The April 2020 “live” SRG meeting took place via an Adobe Connect but otherwise followed the format as normal, with the forum discussions prior to the meeting feeding in.

April 2020

These notes are intended as a taste of the SRG meeting and not a detailed record. These notes are taken from comments made on the dedicated forum spaces and the online meeting content.

The main discussion papers were:

A2 – Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

There has been an increased membership for Big White Wall in Scotland.
One of the reps has also confirmed that there are many of the PGR groups on board with the new strategy.

Within the paper, reps questioned whether there are any milestones that need to be achieved. Confirmation that there are ways to measure are noted in the student facing policies. There was also confirmation from reps who formed part of the panels for this strategy that students will not be required to provide evidence for urgent support needs.

**A3 – Student Learning and adjustment strategy**

Questions were raised for Senate regarding what would happen to the module website access after 3 years if there are still allowances for study to take up to 16 years to complete. The Chair confirmed that this will be raised again and that also there needs to be an understanding of expectations in terms of the current situation.

Reps felt that this paper has a lack of urgency and complacency and that the resource at the University needs to be increased to support this. The chair has confirmed that there should be a push to create accessibility for more online activities to be available in an offline format and whether the University can follow up on whether students are receiving the resources. The Chair also indicated that whilst we should keep pushing the university on this did not feel that the responsible staff were complacent and that there was indeed a sense of urgency.

**A4 – Academic Governance Review**

The group would like to acknowledge the hard work that reps have done as part of this review and confirmation that as well as this the Representation Review and work done by Appointments Committee will also feed into some of the suggested changes. The only concerns raised at this stage were that items discussed as ‘quick wins’ would be the only ones dealt with and the bigger objectives would be forgotten.

**A5 – AL contract update**

The group raised the question about whether the outcome of the contract was different to what the ALs voted for. Although the CSR project will not impact anything within the contract itself, it will no doubt impact the HR side of the implementation process, and there may be some dependencies.

There are concerns about the noted risks in the document as the impact to students because of insufficient tutor numbers s marked as ‘low’ which is not the case, and this will be raised further. Under the current circumstances it looks like the milestones may not be met so are there going to be contingencies made for this?

**A6 – Appointment Process PVC research, enterprise and scholarship.**

There will be a student rep on the panel for this and there are no concerns over the process as the group agreed that it is good that this process is now going external.
A student raised a concern over the term ‘gypsy’ as this should not be used within this context and perhaps this select group of students should be referred to in a different manner. This will be raised with the Head of Academic Governance to change.

**B2 – Honorary Degrees**

The group agrees that there should be a process but doesn’t seem to be enough mention of contracting the Honorary Graduate to ask their view of any complaints against this and not tell them if the committee agree to retain the honorary degree only if they retract it.

**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](mailto:Student-Voice-Team@open.ac.uk)