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.
June 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:

**A1 – Academic decisions in response to Covid 19 S-2020-03-01**

Cine to chair for this paper.

Members were asked to comment on the work of the emergency management team and the academic implications subgroup to confirm that appropriate action has been taken to maintain academic quality and standards. Extensive discussions have already been taking place on the forum and therefore the expectation is that there will be questions raised for senate members to take to senate. Points raised on the forum include consideration of the equality impact, Special circumstances and communication

One of the reps posed the question about whether what is written in this paper can be changed and is not setting stone. In response to this question, it appears that they want to go ahead with what is mentioned in this paper whether it is finalised or not.

Another response was that to a large extent any comments made by the SRG apply to the decisions that have already happened in the past for example a policy defining no detrimental impact when infract it was agreed that there is no such thing as a detrimental principle.

In terms of whether changes can be made moving forward there are remote exams in September which presents the potential to request that things are reviewed and reconsidered. Although they might be done and dusted, senate 6 should be able to challenge because there are still exam sessions happening and those decisions that have been made can still be reviewed and reversed before the end of the year.

A note was made by one of the reps highlighting that it is important to consider that any policy developed and agreed now as a result of covid 19 will be the template in dealing with any similar occurrences in the future. Therefore, it is important that any decisions made presently aim to be the right decisions.

In response to one of the comments on the forums about having proper procedure and consultation, unfortunately there wasn’t any time to carry these out and decisions had to be made imminently given the current situation.

A rep pointed out that it was a matter of procedure that concerns are raised if only because the next incumbents will say that this was agreed and because there were no objections from senate it implies that the students agreed with this. Another point that the rep raised is that the appeals process ought to be looked at. They do say that you can appeal but more clarification is needed for that. Response to that was that this has not been finalised yet.
Paragraph 25 under communication observations were made that clear communication must be made to ensure that information is trickling down through right channels and to the right people to avoid confusion. Lessons should be learned, and this should have been indicated in the report. Students and staff were receiving the same communication at the same time therefore creating confusion. A suggestion from one of the reps that another paper should be authored to highlight how things can be done better and how lessons learned can be considered for the future. Decisions on communication to students had to made so that students were not feeling left out given that they had concerns about the situation.

Another concern is that social media has an impact on communication amongst students. Some students might have information and it is provided to them via social media in addition to information being given to them from other sources which also brings about more confusion. A rep mentioned that the time emails were sent at 2am on Saturday also caused a lot of stress for students. This is something that should be considered in future communications.

It was noted that until the camel system is replaced, we will still face these types of issues and they can't be avoided due to the current system. Additionally, it was mentioned that there is an OU comms member on the group who will scrutinise information before it is sent out.

Paragraph 17C. One of the reps raised the point about no detriment as one of the principles they were adopting for this process. However, this does not seem to exist in all cases and particularly the way they are dealing with cancelled EMAs and students' performance i.e. students will end up performing far less than they should have done in a normal situation. This would be raised as it is no detriment in any shape or form and should have been considered as quality standards.

Question was posed to students on whether they wanted to raise a complaint on the algorithms that specifically looked at working out a predicted EMA grade. The current version being used this summer is called the quintile model where the difference between assessment won't be the same. Rep raised the question about why we have this in the first place. Student rep raised commented that we will not be able to tell until bulk results are released and how many students are happy.

There are suggestions that the module result panel will be encouraged to be generous and that there would good reason to fail anyone. However, a guarantee has not been given on what actions will be taken for student who has failed. This was raised with Liz and PVC students’ team.

A point raised by the rep was about the 460 student that were given funding to aid them print material out. Students had to raise a complaint to get this funding. Student shouldn’t have to complain to get it. Students should have been notified of the funding in addition to not being required to filling in forms to get the funding. Senate students will consider all the points raised and pick the main points to raise in the senate meeting.
Reps presented at various places within University to get as much input as possible so that other members of staff within University can contribute to the student charter.

All agree that the new charter is a much better version compared to the previous one and will require active promotion across University to ensure it is being used.

Question raised about whether the charter will be linked to other documents. In response to this question it was mentioned that throughout the work being done consulting staff across the university there was consideration on how best to link the charter to other documents. This will rely on the need for people to want to use it. There is concern that people need to read the whole charter to gain considerable understanding of it.

The understanding is that it will be a standalone document and it will also be on a website with all kinds of links to information. It won’t necessarily link to everything else or be accessed from any other links or websites.

Point 5 appendix 1- A question was raised whether we would be adequately funded to achieve this. The response is that they are committed to funding which is a requirement however there is a gap on what funding we would like and what funding they are prepared to give.

Website should highlight its existence. Will it be available on the help centre? The idea is that it will be made available across the university. It will be important to make people more aware of hence why it was made short as part of the change.

One of the reps has raised the point that they carried out similar measures when writing the previous Student charter and asked how things have changed this time round. In response to this the biggest change this time round is who will be an advocate for it. PVC students will hopefully push this, and this might make the difference.

A rep noted that it was important to get it on the help centre and not in the policy and the regulation section of the help centre. This way it will be easily accessible.

A rep mentioned that, to push this further would need help from the lecturers and the whole induction process to promote the student charter.

The PVC team would be considering the induction and implementation of the student charter. Suggestion to take this to the induction group.

All students in agreement that reference should always be made to the charter Review and students use it as a weapon. A question to be asked at senate about implementation.
A3- Degree outcome statement S-2020-03-03

There wasn’t a clear understating of what this paper was achieving.

It’s a requirement by the Office For Students (OFS) originally for all higher education institutions. It was supposed to be done by August but because of the virus it was given extra time. It was crafted to allow for the possibility to change the degree algorithms. A warning will be extended to the committee about this.

It went to academic quality review and comments were made by the rep but did not make changes in accordance to these comments made. No changes have been made and they will be going ahead to submit. There were accuracies which needed explanation but didn’t provide explanation as it was the part that was not going to OFS.

Starred papers

B1-Education Committee S-2020-03-12 (paper 12)

Discussion on the forum about future learn students not being OU students and whether that includes students who are paying the Open University for any kind of qualification or module. In response to this it has been discussed that future learn students were generally considered as OU students.

It has been made explicit at the Academic governance Quality Committee that if students were gaining credit, they were considered OU students. Future learn micro credentials are an issue however they are being paid for. Therefore, there needs to be clarification and additionally for the QAA review it will need to be known whether future learn students are student or not.

Discussion on whether future learn students are considered members of the Student Association however there is lack of clarity on this. It is not mentioned or stipulated anywhere that they were considered as members of the Student Association. It is agreed that if they are OU students then they are members of the Students’ Association.

Point 8.1- A rep raised a question as to whether future learn adheres to the core principle and values of the OU which include being open to all when talking about accessibility for disabled students. In response to this it is noted that future learn is a separate entity and legally don’t have to adhere to the Open University principles. Members agreed that his issue should be raised as we have a moral obligation as part of our mission to raise this especially with anything that is associated with the OU.
B2- Academic Quality and Governance committee S-2020-03-13 (Paper 13)

5.7 Complaints procedures. A student rep raised a question on whether they have resources in place if they get many complaints. It was noted that an external raised this issue where they were experiencing many complaints. OU staff were surprised that this might be an issue.

This issue has been raised by reps and other people as it is expected that there will be several complaints being raised.

SRG comments

Appeal from one of the reps not to lose the annual effectiveness review as it is something that is still outstanding

That’s all for June 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