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 in 6 different categories. You can see the current membership list [see the current membership list here](#).

SRG meets on campus in Milton Keynes before each Senate meeting to consider the business papers and the members also make decisions and 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.
10 October 2018

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

Discussion papers

Academic Performance Report S-2018-04-07

A regular report to Senate. The discussion included:

- Poorly presented statistical information. Confusing way to present information.
- Is the ‘transitional fee’ relevant to Celtic nations? The NI rep thought students had not had the transitional arrangements in place.
- 17J figures for retention are concerning.
- Issues related to Single Component Assessment and More Students qualifying should also be priorities.
- There are processes for ALs-are they being proactive enough to contact students at the right time as per their MILLS initiative? President thought there was work being done to improve the consistency of approach.
- Reps on BoS had heard that students will not respond about their reasons for withdrawing once they have withdrawn.

Response to the Critical Review of the Students First Transformation Programme: Implementation Plan S-2018-04-08

VP Education gave a summary of the work down so far on the Critical Review and posed the question to SRG ‘What do we think should be done in response to the plan?’

Discussion included:

- Although the ‘devil will be in the detail’ the feeling on campus seems more positive and the Association should support the sentiment behind the plan.
- There is still much to be read ‘between the lines’ of the information in the paper.
- What is the time scale for the implementation? How will it fit with the recruitment for the new VC? Will a new VC go back on decisions made now?
- Reference to a 4 Nations operating model-does the Association need to resurrect their old Assembly model?
- The risk assessment doesn’t cover risks to students-it should!
- Hard to trust when the same people who signed off on last 12 month decisions are still in role and advocating different plans.
- The Association doesn’t get much of a mention.
- If the overall OU strategy changes could more and bigger change be on the horizon again?
- Retention at the OU works differently than other HEI as students take breaks and have 16 years to complete. Understand the emphasis on module retention.
- What would SRG like from the implementation?
  - Listening to students more
  - Local support
- don’t put a price on student engagement
- protected characteristic champions on VCE
- a plan B if needed
- less emphasis on recruitment and more on supporting current students
- more student voice
- fewer restrictions on the resources available to the Ass

**Research and Enterprise Plan 2018-2023 S-2018-04-09**

Comment that this was slightly better than previous versions although some sentences still problematic and there are references to HEFCE which no longer exists.

**Scholarship Plan 2018-2023 S-2018-04-10**

Discussion included:

- Good to see evidence of where previous Association comments have been listened to and changes made to reflect them.
- Concern that responses from the consultative forum regarding the plan would be taken into account as fewer than 20 students contributed so hardly constitutes a full picture.

**Appointment of Vice Chancellor S-2018-04-11**

President gave some background about the progression from when the Association had no part in the selection of a new VC to now where a place has been allocated to the President to be an observer on the panel. Happy to have this position as a starting point but hope to be involved in other ways:

- The Association will be invited to take part in a consultation on the ‘qualities and experience’ sought in a VC. SRG forum will have a thread opened for member’s contributions.
- Student member of Council is always involved.
- Hope to repeat previous process which included a small group being part of the prospective candidates meeting students.

**Annual Quality Report S-2018-04-12**

A reminder from VP Education that this paper is concerned with checking the OU quality processes were playing their part properly rather than the outcomes of any specific quality review.

Discussion included:

- NSS is not directly relevant to the OU-can the survey be changed? Not likely to happen.
- In information regarding consultation re tuition delivery students are not mentioned as a key stakeholder.
- There are still outstanding actions from the most recent QAA review. Concern that these will be sidelined even though last time the OU was criticised for unfinished actions, could the same happen again?
- As reviews cover last 12-18 months some outdated references like Digital by Design are still there.
Futurelearn S-2018-04-13

Confidential so unable to report on at this stage

Starred for discussion by SRG members:

Matters Arising S-2018-04-01

Student Member of Council had raised the queries described in this paper and was not wholly happy with the response.

AQGC S-2018-04-02

Discussion included:

- Concern that still no policy regarding recording tutorials.
- Guidelines are available but no policy.
- The OU are trying to get a negotiated settlement.
- Reasons behind delays include concern from ALs but that is not the only reason.

Research Committee S-2018-04-03

Discussion included:

- If PGRs have the opportunity to apply for AL roles without external competition it could mean a reduction of standards for students.
- Agreement that acceptable to have PGRs in addition to a substantive AL but not instead of.
- Concern that satisfaction rates in the PRES have fallen.
- Are students fully supported since the introduction of the Graduate School or are some PGRs ‘falling between’ their faculty and the Grad School?
- Supervisors not being properly trained poses risks for students.
- Deputy President was able to update regarding current work between the Association and the Graduate School.

Central Disciplinary Committee S-2018-04-05

Discussion included:

- Academic Conduct Officers (ACOs) are giving more warnings to students about academic conduct without the student being disciplined than previously-has it become an empty threat?
- Academic conduct issues are wider than the recent ‘essay mills’ issue in the news currently.
- Reps at a Teaching Cttee reported that the time taken to refer to ACOs is very slow and that a student could be referred several times before the first one has been processed fully.
- Does this matter to the average student? All will have agreed to the Code of Practice for Student Discipline when registering but how many know the detail and process of disciplinary procedures?
- Do some students brag about getting away with just a warning?
- Value of the OU degree is undermined.
• Is retention the reason for not disciplining students?
• Have student members on CDC been asked to feedback their thoughts on the numbers reaching CDC? They have reported back collectively via successive VPs Education who used to meet on an annual basis with the CDC secretary.

The Senate 6 members met over a working lunch to discuss all the above and more before attending Senate in the afternoon of Wednesday, 10 October. The following would depend on how the meeting and timings worked out.

Planned to star for discussion:

**S-2018-04-02**
A member to ask for clarity on the recording of online tutorials

**S-2018-04-03**
A member to comment on the risk to standard of student support if plans for PGRs to have internal opportunities to become ALs go ahead

**Discussion**

**S-2018-04-08**
A member to welcome the open and collaborative approach of the plan. Another to indicate that students have not been included in risk assessment. Another to stress that Core Systems Replacement must be stress tested and great care taken to protect student data.

**S-2018-04-10**
A member to give credit that student feedback has made positive changes to the plan.

**S-2018-04-11**
A member to welcome this approach and thank for the opportunity for the President to be involved.

**S-2018-04-12**
A member to use as opportunity to raise ‘digital by design’. Another to raise continued inaccessibility of external examiner reports. Another to point out that students are missing from the list of stakeholders

That’s all for October 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