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.

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.

24 January 2018

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

The agenda for the January meeting included the following papers and discussions:

**Academic Performance Report S-2018-01-06**

Discussion included:
As previously mentioned to the OU at several opportunities, the KPIs for SST response times are still focussed on the time taken rather than the quality of the response. Please could quality be measured too?

**Academic Strategy Implementation update S-2018-01-07**

Discussion included:

- The ongoing challenge of confidentiality for reps on committees. This is affecting their effectiveness and (as requested before) needs more clarity. The suggestion by a senior member of the OU suggests that the Association is ‘overinterpreting’ confidentiality may need to be challenged in the light of other conflicting information and advice from other senior OU staff
- How are sustainable academic communities going to be developed and how will they thrive when other papers suggest the challenges of student isolation and staff homeworking make this difficult? This has been asked before but perhaps the OU need to be asked again
- Reps on OU committees would benefit from CEC steer on policy and how to respond in meetings to ensure the same voice is being heard when appropriate. It was acknowledged that reps on committees including SRG often have more information about current issues than the collective CEC. If that is the case then a process is needed to use that knowledge to help develop Association policy
- When does the OU intend to engage formally with Association CEC regarding the Curriculum Plan as appointed reps are already being asked to comment on this at their committees?

**Learning, Teaching & Innovation: Principles S-2018-01-08**

This paper had two amendments: The first, if approved, would defer approval of the paper until the Teaching Framework is also ready. At that point both principles and Framework would be discussed in detail.

The second amendment would require the removal of the word ‘digital’ from one of the principles.

SRG included discussion around the various permutations-what if the amendment(s) were approved? What if they weren’t? What did the members think about the paper both with and without one or both the amendments? And all points in between but no detail reported here because.....

Hot off the press from Senate is that the first amendment was agreed and therefore the second was not necessary (at this stage). There was a substantive discussion of the paper as a whole but the paper will be back for discussion in April 2018. Watch this space.....


Discussion included:

- Are the pros of NSS being made clear enough to eligible students?
• Are the ‘You said’ style responses an opportunity for the OU to cherry pick which comments are publicised plus there doesn’t seem to be a ‘We did’ to balance the equation
• The themes for the action plan aren’t very clear
• There are some contradictions within the paper that make it confusing
• Some SRG members are also on QEAG (Quality Enhancement Advisory Group) and they had taken the stance to be opposed to asking HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) to reduce the sample for NSS as this wouldn’t necessarily improve satisfaction

Education Committee Group Tuition Policy Working Group Report S-2018-01-10

Discussion included:

• Continuing uncertainty about the policy on recording tutorials. As at previous SRGs there were anecdotal stories about inconsistency surrounding this and suggestions how they might be resolved
• Continuing frustration with the inconsistency of tutor experience. Notwithstanding allowing for different styles, SRG members again gave many anecdotal examples of different advice re referencing, assessment
• Concerns raised over the idea of ‘incentivising tutorials or somehow making compulsory
• Concerns re equality of f2f or online experiences
• How does this all fit in with SFTP? How will SFTP workstreams engage with any recommendations? Will they need to?
• Gender neutral language would be preferable throughout any report or recommendations

MOTION: Students First Transformation Programme (SFTP) S-2018-01-11

Discussion included:

• Agreeing this motion would delay the whole SFTP process-not sure if this would be helpful for current students
• Much uncertainty in the room

MOTION: OU Professorships S-2018-01-12

Discussion included:

• At a time of cost cutting would it be best to use any money to preserve curriculum rather than fund professorships?
• As with the other motion, much uncertainty in the room

Senate approved the professorships by 1 vote.
The Senate members then met separately to discuss all the above and more before attending Senate in the afternoon of Wed 24 January. Separate report to follow when available.

**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.