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

Students.

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. SRG discussions also take place on a dedicated forum space prior to the meeting itself.

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 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.

January 2020

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

The main discussion papers were:

C1 Institutional Performance Report to Senate

The information on this paper is a regular update to Senate and reports on academic performance in terms of student progression including module retention, completion and pass. It also reports on student recruitment.

The chair had provided some questions from this paper for other members of the group to discuss on their papers prior to the meeting.
It was noted that the presentation of this data is quite complex as the colour codes are complicated to assess the data accurately. It would also be easier if this paper was numbered as it makes it more complicated to talk about within the group.

There is no ‘why’ behind the data in the ‘growth and sustainability’ section which would be interesting element to discuss and there needs to be better transparency of the income increase data.

ALs are not being included in the staff sickness data which would impact the data in relation to students, it was advised that ALs may raise this in Senate.

There was a drop in 4% in personal outcome for research and the indicators for this section have dropped quite dramatically. This could be issues surrounding Brexit but at this stage is unclear.

There were some comments made again around the employability skills sections which effects students who are not studying for employment and the group also felt that the apprenticeship targets were ambitious, this information has already been fed back to the Apprenticeship working groups.

**C2 Access and Participation Plan**

Discussions surrounding the plan for a personal pathway advisor in Student Support teams. Appendix 2 point 2: This needs to be made clear to access students that this isn’t an academic role but a support role and not the same as 1-1 tuition. Does there need to be a revision of the Level 0 provision and a need for cheaper intermediate smaller version of access for those wishing to study. This is being investigated currently. There is a pilot project taking place within FASS (point 3 of the paper) but the members of SRG also confirmed that this is taking place across faculties and has been for some time in various forms.

The fee differences for nations is not obvious in this data and this has been an issue for students who are not clear on the system for students paying back after withdrawal from a module.

It was felt from the group that this paper was difficult to read in general and written in a way that is very difficult to interpret the data.

**C4 Student Learning and Adjustment Strategy**

There was a lot of general discussion on this paper and it was left to the end of the meeting to allow for optimal discussion as this has affected so many students and is an important topic. There was an update given from a member who is also part of the working group outside of SRG who confirmed that all concerns were being spoken about and that the other OU members were very concerned for student wellbeing and the problems that were being brought up and are looking at the quick fixes as well as long term objectives for addressing the problems. This would not be in place until 21J presentation.

Despite confirmation that the needs to student views was being met, the paper does not appear to indicate much empathy for students and the problems that have arisen from the alternative format issues. The members of SRG provided many comments for the senate 6 to explain their frustrations and upset over how the paper was written as it did not express the concerns from students. Senate 6 have confirmed they will be raising this with senate as a matter of priority.
C5 Revised Appointment Procedures: Pro-Vice-Chancellors

The group was very happy that there is student representation on the appointments board.

There have been concerns with council about this possibly being an internal candidate and if there is an external candidate appointed then a substantive role would be created for them to then be seconded to the PVC role.

C6 Academic Governance Review: Update

This was an update from the October SRG with encouragement for Senate to take up the recommendations and create an implementation plan.

At this point the Senate 6 members asked the group to help respond with the questions being proposed; what are the 3 actions senate can improve on with how it is working? And comments regarding the relationship between senate and council and how this could be contributed to.

Comments were brought from the AQGC about a timetable of an implementation plan has been delayed at this stage.

These comments lead to a discussion with the group about how best to discuss important matters such as this in different spaces as the SRG does not always provide the right timing. The use of forums, adobe connect sessions, allocated topics of discussion amongst the groups as well as an email chain were discussed, and members decided that a combination of all of these would be useful considering time and location constraints.

Starred Papers

A2 Matters Arising

It was felt by the group that point 3 n this paper did not fully answer the question that was being asked.

B3 Education Committee Minutes

The degree algorithm which is to go to Senate for approval needs to consider the timing properly and an explanation is needed of what happened. The chair gave an explanation that the VC wanted to examine this in more detail.

A member of SRG provided an update on the Bologna programme as provided at FBL teaching committee. This will now be delayed by one year due to the issues that have been raised.

That’s all for January 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