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. SRG meets on campus in Milton Keynes before each Senate meeting to consider the business papers and the members also 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.
26 June 2019

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

Members confirmed that they were now receiving coloured copies of this report which proved more useful.

Student numbers are up but the OU are still operating in a deficit although this has reduced and will continue to do so.

NSS data has not been reflected in this information as it isn’t updated each quarter but will be included in due course.

Academic support noted an increase at only 1%. The Student support data shows a decrease of -3.8% in submissions of TMA01 which is alarming over the 2-year period. The Office of the PVC-Students are aware of this and are looking at ways to support AL intervention over the concern for continuation levels including the support for open entry and support for students via Access modules.

C2 Access, Participation and Success Strategy

Widening Access Strategy (as was). There were concerns that a change in name could mean a change in focus that there was no mention of international students within the paper. There was confirmation from other members that there would potentially be a new international strategy.

Although lots of information regarding fees and funding, there were questions raised about whether they are going to act on discounts for alumni and second-degree discounts?

It is difficult to report on the Augar – after the report’s author Philip Augar, yet as although the report has been published it is not known how much (or how little) of the report will be implemented. The Access team along with the office of the PVC-Student’s policy is being driven by this as all HE requires an Access, Participation and Success Strategy.

The Strategy will apply to all students, particularly in those areas where the OU is not as inclusive as it might be. The strategy is only mentioned in the appendices of the paper rather than the paper itself.

Although the strategy can be approved at Senate it is usual to know that the information on consultation can be used in other areas.

C3 Student Employability Strategy

The PDP tool in modules can help students articulate where in their modules the employability skills are met. Students, including those on Senate expressed concerns that PDP would become a mandatory part of modules. We were informed that this would not normally be the case unless an
accrediting or regulatory required it. However, a firm commitment to that would be sought at Senate.

Interpretation of the paper will be discussed and confirmed at Senate. There have been employability leads placed in schools and resources put in places to support this.

There were concerns over how visible the careers service is for students and that employability is not the soul purpose for studying.

There were also concerns that this was simply another OU policy and showed a disconnect at SST and careers level. There is also no mention of SiSe students within the policy.

**C4 Associate Lecturer Contract: Update**

Needs to show the student as high risk and this will be raised at Senate. There were also conversations about ensuring there is student representation on this group which although has been agreed, was a struggle.

**C5 FutureLearn: Update**

This has been carried over from the last Senate. There were concerns about the return that SEEK can take as part of the 5-year deal being proposed and that SEEK are also investing in other companies. However, there was also points made about how this investment would be positive as it is keeping FutureLearn afloat.

**C6 Academic Governance Review: Update**

There are errors in the paper which will be rectified.

OU non-progress report – the final report needs to be more accurate. The AQGC paper for the meeting on the 1st July will give more context for this.

The discussion for October Senate might be for discussion at this point but not approval due to the new term for the VC commencing in September.

**C7 Annual Effectiveness Review**

There were only 50% of responses received for the surveys around the effectiveness review.

The size of Senate was in discussion but there is a risk that only senior members would remain. There was discussion around the rationale to increase the Senate 6 to 7 members, but this would require more discussion going forward.

Overall, this information will feed in to the Academic Governance review but there was concerns about how reflective the effectiveness review is.

**B1 Academic Quality and Governance Committee**

Discussions around the recording of tutorials in which Liz Marr, PVC Students, continues to share the views of SRG and is pushing forward on a final policy.
Question arose from point 4.11 as to whether the current chair of this committee will be replaced after his retirement. This is not known yet, but the next meeting is on Monday 1st July so will provide an update if known.

D4 Emeritus Professors

There was discussion around the Emeritus professorships but for confidentiality reasons the names cannot be published on these notes.

AOB

Thanks all round to SRG members for the last year and all the hard work they have put in.

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