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 (CCRs) appointed on behalf of the Board of Trustees

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 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.

October 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

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.

Discussion points raised included:
Students would like to ask Senate for modules that may be performing poorly if this information is to be discussed then it should also be shared at Senate. The question of cost recovery in the research level will also be discussed as whether this is a good or bad statistic and further clarification is required.

Is it in the OU strategy to support students studying for personal gain and studying at P/T rather than F/T? The OU must ‘tick boxes’ when it comes to employability, but these other students must not be ignored within the strategy who are studying for personal gain rather than for employment.

Within the Student Success section of the paper, conversations took place around Post Graduate completion and pass rates as these numbers have decreased. This is an area of concern, but comments were made around students work/life balance and standards across the OU and HE around employability. Is the OU too harsh? Does the Algorithm for determining results need updating? It was confirmed that these points will be brought to the next Assessment and Qualification Committee meeting for discussion.

Within the excellent teaching and research paper – this shows a large decrease in Research bid. More information would be useful on this as to whether it is faculty based and whether external factors are needed for consideration, e.g. International research bid effected by Brexit.

Income from apprenticeships was also discussed and how can the association represent these students more.

Students raised concerns about how reliable the information in the appendix was, as the data wasn't sourced, and some conclusions seemed to be drawn from interviews with a small number of people.

**C2 Academic Governance review report and C3 Annual Effectiveness Review of Academic Governance**

An overview and update of this paper was provided for new members of SRG. The main points for discussion was around section L ‘Student Representation’ and was made clear that the discussion of increasing technology was not so there would be less face to face meetings for students to attend but for more options to enable better remote student collaboration.

Would the 24 hours’ notice suggested for questions to Senate impact the way SRG operates? A key question was asked ‘what is Senate for?’

Comments from the rep review around the diversity of student engagement and student voice awareness require a push but this forms part of the new association strategy so is being looked at.

An update from a student member on the review of academic governance was provided but no further information to add.

**C4 Annual Quality Report**

A brief comment was made around the language use of this paper in that the print Vs online data is ‘felt’ rather than a matter of fact from the view of student engagement.
C5 AL Contract Update

A general update was provided for the benefit of the group. Questions around the risk factors for ALs who do not wish to transfer to the new contract and therefore leave the OU. What does this mean for students? Also, discussion about reassurance of the skills audit that will be needed for ALs and how this will be maintained and monitored. Better communication is also required for international students and their tutors.

C6 FutureLearn Update

There were some concerns that the paper had no costings included for the pilot. How would Senate be able to approve anything if there are no numbers? There were also concerns that there is no student involved on the working group, however this has now been rectified but the paper does not show this yet.

The group would like to enquire whether the micro-credential modules will have specific start dates throughout the year or are more flexible?

C7 Deputy Vice-Chancellor Role

A student member of the panel has now been added to the procedure for this appointment.

Starred Papers

B2 Research Committee

The minutes discussed Post Grad Research student teaching opportunities but there is no mention of the impact this may have on undergraduate students. Questions from the group to take forward were, how will these students be trained/monitored and reviewed so that it does not affect other students? Specifically, the question was about monitoring the effect on undergraduate students, whether this is good or bad.

B3 Education Committee

Point 14.7 of the minutes (Pass marks for postgraduate taught qualifications) – is action being taken forward on this and is there student involvement?

B5 Special Appeals Committee

Questions from the group that were previously discussed on the forum spaces included: Is the process too severe as students have no opportunity to appeal?

There have been enhanced checkers included on essay mills looking for a consistent academic style which may impact this.
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