

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

STUDENT SENATE

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE MEETING OF STUDENT SENATE - MAY 2014

This Report summarises the business of the twelfth meeting of Student Senate, held on 7 May 2014.

1. Welcome and opening remarks

The Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Student Senate, Professor Paul O'Prey, welcomed all students and staff present to the meeting, and it was noted that some apologies had been received from students taking assessments at this time, and from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor who were abroad on University business.

The meeting was also advised that the proposed boycott by members of the University and College Union nationally, which might have led to work submitted at this time by students not being marked, had now been called off after acceptance of a pay settlement by this and other trades unions with members at the University.

The Vice-Chancellor also thanked all, including RSU sabbaticals and staff, who had contributed to a response from 78% of Roehampton final-year students to the 2014 National Student Survey.

2. Report from the last meeting (Paper RSS12/1)

The Report from the last meeting of Student Senate, held in February, was approved. The report had been presented both to the University Senate and the governing body, the University Council, and at both meetings the deliberations of the Student Senate had been welcomed and appreciated.

Under matters arising from the Report, Paul DaBell gave an update on the work of the WISH (Student Hub) group. The group was still looking to explore more campuses (inside London and in the north of England) to see facilities available to students, and determine their popularity and practicality with users. The group also considered that it would be useful to seek professional advice from architects about potential developments at Roehampton, and to this end they had spoken to staff in Estates and Campus Services (E&CS).

However, as this was a potentially expensive route, and the University was already engaged in extensive campus developments, it was recommended that proposals for seeking professional advice should be further discussed with the Director of E&CS.

3. Report back on 'Top of your agenda' item at the last meeting

The Secretary to Student Senate, Andrew Skinner, reported on the University's responses to the major items of concern raised by student senators under this item at the last meeting.

The timetabling staff were using room audits to address concerns about unnecessary extended booking of teaching spaces, and would also be interested to have details from student representatives of any compulsory teaching held on Wednesday afternoons as very little had apparently been requested.

The computer room facilities at Whitelands College had also been enhanced by the addition of a new open access suite in Room 2010, from February of this year.

Under this item, Rachael Blaney of RSU also reported on attempts to attract students who are also parents to engage in a pre-study forum and in peer-support group. Unfortunately a lunch arranged for student parents had no attendees, and every effort is now being made by RSU and the chaplaincy coordinator to identify and engage so as to determine the best sort of support to provide for them. It was likely that nursery or short-term crèche facilities at key periods in the academic calendar might be welcomed, although the expense of nursery facilities in the past has led the University to encourage students to use the excellent nursery facilities within short distances from the campuses.

4. RSU 'Tell Us More' Report (Paper RSS12/2)

Wade Tomlinson, President of RSU, opened a discussion about this report, provided at the meeting, and resulting from face-to-face sessions with self-selecting groups of students drawn from all levels of study at each of the four colleges.

The report used a traffic-light scheme of presentation to split information into categories of positive feedback (designated green), potential 'quick wins' (amber) and more challenging (red). Common themes emerging at the sessions included the disparity of the on-campus and off-campus experience, finding out about University facilities and communication in particular in relation to academic study.

Regarding University facilities it appeared that, although encouraged to do so at welcome tours and sessions, students may not use the website extensively to investigate services and advice available to them, even though the new website had attracted a lot of interest and praise from outside the University.

The issues identified about communication in relation to study led to an initial discussion about the many and various ways that academic and professional staff use the Moodle platform, where the variety and/or inconsistency within and across programmes may actually discourage students from engaging with, or limit the effectiveness of, Moodle as a standard and routine method of communication and provision of materials.

It was generally considered among student members that more instruction on the use of Moodle in early weeks of study would be invaluable. It was agreed, at the suggestion of the Chair, that an item about Moodle and its use should be a major item at the next meeting of Student Senate, when appropriate staff would also be invited to attend and contribute to the discussion.

From the latter part of the report it was noted that catering facilities and quality of food on offer was generally considered to be good, but there were also useful and practical suggestions for improvements which would be passed on to those planning and operating catering services.

Overall the Report was welcomed at Student Senate, and considered to include a lot of information and feedback that would be useful to staff and to the RSU as the basis to improve the student experience at Roehampton in the future.

5. Student-led Budget (*Paper RSS12/3*)

The President of RSU reminded the meeting about the use of the £50k student-led budget allocation for the current academic year, 2013-14. The following had all benefited from the funding allocation:

- Bicycle-hire scheme
- Smart-screens in major social spaces
- Support for 'Fresh TV'
- Support for repair and decoration of the RoeActive gymnasium

This meeting also included further discussion with students regarding their recommendations for spending the student-led budget allocation for next academic year, 2014-15.

Paper RSS12/3 listed eleven proposals assembled by RSU regarding potential use of the student-led budget. Some detail regarding each of the items on that list was provided at the meeting by Wade Tomlinson or Jonathan Carter, who had investigated and noted student views on possible uses of this funding.

The list below comprises the three most popular suggestions from the list which were supported following Student Senate's consideration of each of the eleven proposals.

1. Provide support for large-scale student-led events, designed to attract students, staff and the local community.
2. Support for development of an RSU App, designed to increase student knowledge and awareness of events, services and support available.
3. Enhancement of University and college outdoor spaces to make them more appealing and attractive to all.

RSU would work with appropriate senior staff to determine how the student-led funding would be distributed and spent in 2014-15.

6. 'Top of your agenda'

In this standing item on the Student Senate agenda, student members present were asked to raise matters currently affecting their student experience, whether positive or negative in nature. Where there were concerns indicated these would be looked into by staff and RSU members with a view to providing solutions and/or reporting back to the next meeting.

Additionally, at this last meeting of the academic year, student representatives were asked to summarise what made Roehampton special or unique for them. Views resulting included:

- Roehampton is 'a city campus with a village atmosphere'
- The University is small, so it's a real community and like a big family
- 'A small space with a big heart'
- Student views are listened to (for example at Student Senate) and acted upon
- Staff/student engagement and support is good
- Lots of opportunities to follow up

7. 'Growhampton' Update

Joel Williams, Grower for the project, took those present on a tour of key sites at Digby Stuart and Froebel Colleges. Growing sites for produce were being developed at all four colleges.

From its inception, the Growhampton project had gone from strength to strength very quickly, and at 1.15pm on Monday 12 May, the 'Hive Café' would be opened in Digby Square. This ceremony would occur in the presence of the local MP, the Deputy Mayor, representatives from NUS and the 'Regenerate' charity, the Chair of Roehampton Council and senior staff of the University and colleges. All staff and students were invited to the opening. Once fully established, the Café would sell refreshments including sandwiches using local produce on bread baked locally on the Roehampton Alton Estate in conjunction with 'Regenerate'.

The meeting also visited growing areas at Froebel College including outside raised beds near the RSU facilities, and an extensive Polytunnel near to student plots. Crops of vegetables were already being harvested and sold to staff and students. Growhampton would also be playing its part in the NUS 'Student Eats' stand at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show (19-24 May), by supplying produce alongside that provided by other major projects also sponsored by the NUS green fund.

The project team led by Theresa and Joel were grateful for support from volunteers from the Alton Estate as well as RSU and the University, both in establishing the growing beds and helping with harvesting. Interest in Growhampton was already very high, and growing, and access to information on the RSU and University Websites was reflecting that interest, scoring many hits from inside and outside the University.

Student Senate extended its congratulations and thanks to the Growhampton Team and all its various student, staff and community supporters for really putting the University on the map with the successful initiation of this ambitious development of the green agenda of Roehampton.

8. Thank yous

At the close of the meeting the Vice-Chancellor thanked all the student representatives on Student Senate 2013-14 for their high level of engagement and contributions to meetings, and wished those who were concluding studies or RSU roles, and leaving the University, the very best for the future.

9. Date of next meeting

November 2014 (date to be confirmed)

*Andrew Skinner, Deputy University Secretary
Secretary to Student Senate
May 2014*