

## UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

### STUDENT SENATE

#### Summary Report on the last meeting of Student Senate

The nineteenth meeting of the University Student Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, was held on Wednesday 23 November 2016.

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed all present. As this was the first meeting of the new academic year, the majority of student representatives present were new to Student Senate. In the context of consideration of Paper 1, the **Terms of Reference, composition and membership**, all students and staff present introduced themselves briefly. The Vice-Chancellor advised the meeting that for the last six years Student Senate had been a useful and effective forum for students and staff to share ideas, proposals and views, and the meetings had informed University strategies. Both Senate and Council received summary reports of the meetings regularly.

The **Report on the last meeting** (Paper 2, previously circulated) was confirmed by those present as an appropriate record of business. Under matters arising Students' Union representatives present reported on use so far in the year of the allocated Student-led Budget for 2016-17, which was addressing the following areas:

- *Part-time interns in RSU*: These had been appointed for 2016-17
- *Engagement project for off-campus students*: a scheme of student mentors for students based offsite had been established by RSU and was proving effective; a Celebration early in the term for off-campus students had also proved successful
- *Black History Month events and BAME and diverse cultures-focused engagement*: The recent BAME Conference had proved extremely attractive to students, and the funding had certainly assisted in the quality of speakers and the event generally
- *Free lockers on campus and lockable device-charging stations*: This was still being investigated to ensure an effective approach to location across the University, and value-for-money
- *De-stressing events around examination periods*: a 'Chillathon' and events in the Library had been well-attended and effective
- *Pop-up cinema kit for general use*: This was now available for use

Under matters arising from the last meeting it was also noted that the cancellation of debt of, and additional funding for, student societies had been welcomed and was proving a very practical support to societies' plans for the academic year.

### ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

#### **Student attendance monitoring**

Dr Stephen Driver (Deputy Provost [Learning & Teaching]) gave the meeting an update on new electronic processes introduced at the University. The process of monitoring attendance

was not new in itself, for example by signing a register, but the electronic processes introduced were new. Although there had been some initial problems with the technology, accurate recording and appropriate follow up is improving. Students who appear not to be attending can now be contacted at an early stage by staff to provide advice or support.

Students at the meeting raised various points about the practicalities and operation of the swipe-in system, as they were not sure whether they had to record their presence within a certain time after commencement of teaching session, and whether less structured sessions with optional attendance would incur unintentional penalties for students. Lecturers were not always aware themselves about these and other related matters when asked, so more information to both staff and students would be helpful.

### **New developments in the Students' Careers Portal**

Eleanor Merrick (Director of Alumni, Development and Careers) gave the meeting a presentation about the Portal, which had been enhanced by significant recent additions. Students now had easy access to a useful guidance and processes, as wide-ranging as a CV builder, psychometric tests to identify strengths, transferable skills and potential career-paths for individuals, and pointers to volunteering or study-abroad opportunities.

It was also noted that very large numbers of former students were now prepared to act as alumni-mentors to current students, who could be linked up to mentors accordingly. 'Chancellor's Careers Awards' were also soon to be launched, and students were encouraged to think about potential careers from early on in their studies.

During discussion at the meeting, student members said that knowledge and willingness to use the portal was variable, and they forward a number of ideas to ensure wide publicity and encouragement for the careers support available at the University. These included advertising in newsletters, and via a Youtube-style video; signposting students when they use Moodle; building into courses via employability modules where not already addressed.

Finally the Vice-Chancellor noted that Roehampton had a very good record for ensuring progression of graduates into employment or further study (currently 93%), with some 78% currently going into appropriate graduate-level study.

### **The Student Academic Voice**

In his second item Dr Driver pointed out the nationally-recognised importance of listening to students views when developing academic policy at a university, and staff considered that Roehampton had been effective at this for many years now, not least vis Student Senate. Staff were keen to hear from students, and to know from students the methods of doing this that would appeal.

There were now both national (the National Student Survey) and local surveys of students' views. Roehampton had also recently appointed Marilyn Holness as Director of Student Engagement, and in that context students' feedback on engagement was now particularly requested. Students were already involved as programme representatives, and in new programme approval and review, and programme annual reviews (PARs).

Students considered that they needed help to understand assessment criteria particularly, especially as they studied a wide range of modules with differing assessments and they

came from varied educational backgrounds. However they needed to understand context when being asked their views, and some more training would enhance their confidence and involvement. Discussion with their peers could be encouraged especially via Twitter as well as at wider meetings of programme representatives from across subject areas. Getting students' views via module evaluation forms and surveys of a more general kind had to be made as easy as possible, with good background information to inform from the start.

### **RSU Advice Service**

George Cole (RSU Vice-President [Welfare]) advised that RSU would like to enhance their abilities to advise students with a more formal advice service. Currently the Union staff were able only to signpost students for help in key areas (such as money-management, mental health, drug-related issues and trauma), but the experience of other students' unions in the UK had demonstrated the value of members of staff able to counsel and respond more directly to students.

There was already staff support for investigating this proposal, and further consideration would be taken forward in discussion with the University Registrar.

### **University accommodation laundry services**

This section of the agenda and meeting concluded with a long and extensive discussion about laundry services for resident students, as it appeared that in this year many residents were experiencing difficulties in the context of such a high demand on washing machines due to much higher resident numbers in the new Halls of Residence.

Details of the points raised were recorded by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, who also advised that various methods were being considered to alleviate current problems. The meeting considered that the following may help current difficulties: lower prices for 'off-peak' use; standardised prices for all machines; a mix of cash- and cash-less machines; more general access to students whichever building they were actually resident in. The needs of students with mobility restrictions needed particularly to be prioritised, to reflect the inaccessibility of some of the machines to those individuals.

## **'TOP OF YOUR AGENDA'**

In this regular item students told the meeting about a range of matters of particular interest to them as individuals.

On this occasion these included concerns relating to the new Halls of Residence, Elm Grove and Chadwick, relating to maintenance and Wi-Fi provision. There had also been some problems with heating and hot water supplies in parts of the University, including Halls. These problems were already being looked into by staff responsible for the estate. College presidents raised matters relating to social space developments.

Regarding academic support, students were concerned that Academic Learning Advisers were no longer available for individuals, but Professor Julie Hall explained that more – and very useful - on-line material was now available to students 24/7.

RSU sabbatical staff and representatives encouraged students to engage with their 'Ideas Policy' which they could use it to change or influence RSU policies and approaches. Disciplinary follow-up for events was also raised as the number of disciplinary officers available to investigate non-academic cases was now limited to Heads of College; this would be addressed by the University Secretary.

RSU was also very happy to report that current BAME events at the University had been very successful and well-attended. The Raising and Giving (RAG) Committee and Week had also scored significant successes, and the considerable efforts involved were appreciated by all present at the meeting.

At the end of the meeting the Vice-Chancellor thanked all present for their commitment to Student Senate this year, adding best wishes for the Christmas break.

Next meeting: Wednesday 22 February 2017

*Andrew Skinner,*

*University Secretary and Secretary to Student Senate*

*January 2017*