

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON STUDENT SENATE

Report to Council from its meeting on 25 November 2020

Committee Chair: Professor Jean-Noël Ezingard

The 31st meeting of the University Student Senate was held on Wednesday 25 November 2020 via Zoom.

Report from the last meeting

The report from the last meeting was presented to Student Senate.

Update on the start of term

At the beginning of the meeting, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed everyone to the first Student Senate of the year, particularly those who were attending for the first time. It was also noted that this was Reggie Blennerhassett's last meeting of Student Senate as he was retiring at the end of the year.

The Vice-Chancellor gave an update on University business since the start of the 2020-21 academic year. It was noted that the pandemic presented significant and particular challenges for Roehampton students and that the University was doing everything it could to provide effective support. This included providing IT equipment, hardship funding, practical support to students living on-campus such as food packages and blended learning as far as possible. The University had also put in place a system for managing resident students who needed to enter self-isolation as a result of Government guidelines. The University was working with RSU at every stage to ensure that students were represented during key decision-making.

Student Senate noted that there were some challenges with students' experiences during the first term of 2020-21. This included challenges relating to University accommodation and security on campus, which a number of Student Senators said could be improved. It was agreed that Senior Staff would hold further meetings with Student Senators to discuss their experiences with accommodation and security on-campus to ensure that any feedback was used to improve the overall experience.

Roehampton Students' Union Priorities for 2020-21

Student Senate received an update from the RSU President on RSU priorities for 2020-21. It was noted that RSU was primarily concerned with supporting students in the specific circumstances of the pandemic. The RSU Trustee Board had agreed four strategic principles for 2020-21 and a number of associated objectives. The strategic principles were as following:

- Core activity
- People matters
- Digital acceleration
- Commercial resilience

Community building

Student Senate received a presentation on community building during the pandemic and members were invited to provide feedback and ideas on how community could be maintained in a blended environment. A number of suggestions were discussed and would be developed further by Senior Staff. Suggestions included the following:

- Continuing to adapt student support structures to a blended environment
- Convening more outdoor events and other events that comply with the social distancing guidelines
- Developing more high quality, online events

N.B. The Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor & Chief Operating Officer wrote to Student Senators on 27 November 2020 and 18 December 2020 respectively with updates following the meeting.

Next meeting: 3 February 2021

*George Turner
University Secretary & Clerk to Council
November 2020*

Message from the Vice-Chancellor to Student Senators – 27 November 2020

Dear Members of Student Senate,

I am writing to thank you for taking the time to attend the meeting of Student Senate on Wednesday and for the contributions you all made. My first ever meeting as Vice-Chancellor at the University was with Student Senate and I am hugely thankful to those of you that give your time in this way. There were some very important points made and useful discussions on Wednesday. I have asked members of my senior team to review the feedback we received and to develop plans to address any concerns.

I know it has been a challenging term for all of our students at the end of what has been an exceptionally difficult year and I am proud of what our students have achieved during this period, through hard work and perseverance. Colleagues across the University have worked tirelessly to deliver learning and student support in new ways during the pandemic, and to provide support in extraordinary circumstances. There is always more we can do, and we are committed to ensuring that our students have the very best experience possible at Roehampton. We will keep working hard, with the help of your feedback, to improve all areas of the University and our activities.

We have already picked up and are addressing many of the practical issues that were raised on Wednesday, but I also wanted to take this opportunity to mention a couple of key points from the meeting.

I want to assure you that student safety will always be our absolute priority – thank you to members who raised important issues and concerns about this. We have put in place many measures, including hiring additional security officers during the pandemic, and I want to ensure we do everything we can to make you feel safe. We always keep our policies and procedures under review, and I have also asked our Chief Information Officer and Director of Estates to work with other colleagues to identify any additional practical measures that can be put in place. Please do continue to encourage your fellow students to report anything they may notice, experience or are concerned about to the Security Team. If there are specific concerns that you would like raise, either about incidents that have not previously been reported or about the way existing reports have been handled, please feel free to write to George Turner who will ensure that these are fully addressed.

Some of you raised issues with the speed of processes in University accommodation. I have asked our Chief Operating Officer to look into the concerns that were voiced, and I understand that many have already been resolved. Nonetheless I appreciate that in some cases it may have taken an unreasonably long time for issues to be addressed and I have also asked that he looks again at the processes by which concerns about accommodation are raised to ensure that students feel that they are being addressed in a suitable and timely manner. We will involve student senators in this process.

As mentioned on Wednesday, our Internal Communications Manager will set up a communications meeting with a group of student senators to gather feedback and ideas for the future, to enhance the work that is already undertaken with the RSU. If you would like to be involved in this, please do [email Leah Bunn](#).

Lastly, I am pleased to inform you that we have now finalised the end-of-term Covid-19 testing site installation and received the testing kits from HM Government. More information will be provided on this in the next few days and I would welcome all of your support in ensuring that our student body are aware of the optional testing programme in the coming days. We will be providing more information to all students on testing, teaching, support and facilities in the run

up to Christmas, next week. I would like to thank those of you who have offered to help with the testing programme.

I am confident that next year we will gradually move back to a sense of normality nationally and at the University. However, we will continue in the meantime to do everything we can to ensure our students get the support they need. I'll be writing to all students in December about our plans for January and beyond.

In the meantime, if you have any specific concerns, proposals or suggestions, please do [email George Turner, University Secretary](#). Both myself and my colleagues also meet regularly with the Students' Union sabbatical officers who I know will be happy to raise ideas and suggestions with us.

Best wishes,

Jean-Noël

Professor Jean-Noël Ezingeard
Vice-Chancellor

Message from the Pro Vice-Chancellor & Chief Operation Officer to Student Senators – 18 December 2020

Dear Members of Student Senate,

Further to the Vice-Chancellor's email on 27 November, I want to take this opportunity to update you on the specific actions and measures we have put in place in relation to accommodation and estates, following feedback from Student Senate and other students. We are committed to ensuring that our students have the very best experience possible at Roehampton and members of the University's senior team are implementing plans to address the concerns that have been raised.

Firstly, during the winter break, there will be a deep-clean of all communal areas in University accommodation, including communal bathrooms. Deep cleaning of bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms can also be provided, if requested on [ServiceDesk](#). More information about this can be found on the portal [here](#). Over the winter break and early in the New Year, we will also be identifying key communal areas to be redecorated, including any work that was delayed due to lockdown, and we will be undertaking a heating audit across the University to ensure we identify any issues in this area. If detected, any issues will be fixed as soon as possible.

Over the last several weeks, we have reached out to college presidents, flat reps and other students to identify and discuss any concerns across campus. A Whitelands group has already met and the actions from this are being followed up on. These include introducing lockers for student post, enhanced Security patrols and work to address concerns around fire drills.

In response to feedback about the speed of processes in University accommodation, we are working closely with our Accommodation and Maintenance teams to ensure that students feel issues are being addressed in a suitable and timely manner. As part of this work, we are reminding students - including in the [Christmas and New Year Need-To-Know](#) - about the process of how to report maintenance issues, to ensure all issues are logged, recorded and correctly dealt with. We will update any issues raised as soon as possible with timelines for resolution.

I would like to thank members who have expressed an interest in joining the communications meeting in January that will be an opportunity to raise any ideas around how we communicate more broadly with students, as well as any barriers or areas of concern. If you would like to be involved in this meeting please email our Internal Communications Manager, Leah Bunn (leah.bunn@roehampton.ac.uk).

I would also like to take this opportunity to let you know that I am retiring at Christmas. It has been a real pleasure working with you and I am hugely thankful to those of you that give your time in this way and for your invaluable contributions. Tom Rowson has been appointed to the role of Chief Operating Officer and will be joining Student Senate for the first meeting of 2021 in early February.

I wish you all the best for the remainder of this year, and for a safe and restful Christmas break.

Best wishes,

Reggie

Reggie Blennerhassett

Pro Vice-Chancellor & Chief Operating Officer