

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

COUNCIL

Summary Report on the meeting of Student Senate held on 6 November 2013

This brief report summarises the business of the tenth meeting of Student Senate. It is intended that a more detailed report will be made available on the University Website in due course.

1. Welcomes and Composition

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed all present to the meeting of Student Senate, which was now entering its fourth year. Many student members had been newly appointed for 2013-14 by academic departments or the Students' Union Council, and between them they represented the full range of levels of study, both younger and more mature students and students from within and outside the UK.

2. Report from the last meeting

Staff and Roehampton Students' Union (RSU) members reported progress on action points noted at the last meeting, held in May. The 'Growhampton' bid to the National Union of Students (NUS) had been successful and further information on developments were reported later in the meeting. Other matters related to seeking to improve facilities, principally reciprocal arrangements with libraries overseas, extensions to London bus routes and better on-campus laundry facilities, and these had all been investigated.

3. Student Welcome and orientation

David Dickinson, newly appointed Director of Student Experience, opened a discussion about the University's orientation programme at the start of the academic year, seeking student members' views on how much the programme addresses students' needs.

Discussion centred initially on balancing academic and procedural needs with opportunities for students to socialise and make friends in the early days of their studies. It was considered that, especially with many students off-site, more targeted e-mail lists could assist in encouraging attendance and contact at events, but face-to-face student mentoring systems were also successful where established, such as in the Business School. Additional targeting of particular constituencies, such as mature students, via e-mail would also be welcomed by students, as would electronically based newsletters about events.

Students identified the need to get to know people as essential to becoming a student member of the community, alongside getting into their studies via briefing sessions, citing effective communication tools as essential to this process. Both staff

and RSU were endeavouring to increase variety of communication routes effectively within data protection requirements. The importance of ensuring international students, who had an extensive and early orientation programme, and also those based off-campus were well served was also highlighted.

4. Transforming Assessment Pilot Scheme (TAPS)

Joy Vamvakari and Bridget Middlemass, of Learning & Teaching Enhancement Unit, sought students' views on the various assessment methods they experienced at Roehampton, and whether they would welcome different approaches to assessment. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is sponsoring the TAPS programme, and Roehampton is feeding student opinion into that.

Some students considered that current assessment methods were sometimes inappropriate for their subject area, or were too complex or time consuming. There was varying reaction to group assessment methods, especially if the input and reflections of each individual was not also being assessed alongside overall achievement. Students sometimes found working on more technically based forms of assessment, such as production of webpages, too time consuming. Good subject knowledge could be hidden by demanding technical requirements.

Students recognised the importance of learning a range of skills, and developing an individual style of expression, but felt some assessment methods could be counter productive and might be reconsidered in subject context. The presenters noted the comments, and advised that they would be looking into assessment methods in the context of overall workload as part of the TAPS project.

5. Graduation Ceremonies: Student feedback and future arrangements

RSU sabbatical officers had compiled feedback, largely provided via students' Facebook pages, regarding the University's Graduation arrangements and ceremonies. A lot of the feedback was negative, being related to high costs, remote location at Guildford, limited availability of guest tickets and that certificates were no longer provided at the ceremonies. The comments also indicated confusion about the information provided, both when provided and content. However, some students had taken the time to say that they had enjoyed the event and some considered it good value and well organised.

Staff members provided background to the various types of comment made and why there were sometimes problems, and how they were rectified or would be. Multiple Graduation ceremonies are inevitably costly and require long-term and efficient planning.

RSU sabbaticals had discussed the feedback in detail with Eleanor Merrick, Director of Alumni Development, who was seeking to address the most important and frequent concerns.

Under this item, Eleanor also detailed arrangements planned for the future, which in time would bring graduation ceremonies on site, although they will be held at London's Royal Festival Hall in March and July in this academic year.

6. 'Growhampton' Project

Teresa Shephard, Project Development Officer for Growhampton, reported on progress so far in the context of the mission, aims and implementation plans of the project. Roehampton was one of twenty-five applicant institutions which received money from the NUS Green fund, and the plans were ambitious.

As well as growing and selling crops and food on campus, Growhampton would also seek to integrate with the local community, and to build sustainability values into the curriculum, and eventually create a green fund for student led projects.

Students and staff present welcomed the information on the project, which would be formally launched at the RSU's 'Winter Wonderland' event on Wednesday 11 December.

7. 'Top of your agenda'

The meeting closed with an opportunity for student members to raise matters important to them at present.

The range of matters mentioned included concerns that compulsory teaching sessions on Wednesday afternoons was now common, and was hindering students' opportunities for sports activities, and this will be further investigated.

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that staff members would be following up various points raised under this item, and closed the first Student Senate meeting of the year.

8. Dates of future meetings:

Wednesday 26 February 2014

Wednesday 7 May 2014

*Andrew Skinner
Deputy University Secretary
Secretary to Student Senate
November 2013*