

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

COUNCIL / SENATE

STUDENT SENATE

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE STUDENT SENATE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2015

1. Report from the last meeting, terms of reference and membership

The Vice Chancellor welcomed all those present which included many student representatives who were new to the forum, including some of the RSU members. The Registrar and the University Secretary, both newly appointed, were present among the senior staff at the meeting.

Before other business, the meeting confirmed terms of reference, membership and the report from the last meeting of Student Senate, which was held in May 2015.

2. National Student Survey

Senior staff initially led a discussion around encouraging final-year students to take part in responding to the National Student Survey, to ensure that the widest range of student views were recorded and considered. It was generally agreed that providing incentives such as 'Amazon' vouchers or opportunities in a prize-draw were effective, alongside methods of facilitating the survey completion process and making it easy for students to engage.

3. Academic Calendar

Proposals relating to a review of the academic calendar were presented by Dr Stephen Driver, Deputy Provost Learning & Teaching. Consideration is being given to the start date of the year, and whether to move to a semester system and a return to some teaching taking place after the Easter vacation.

In particular, students' views were sought on a later start to commencement of the year, and on the number of weeks' teaching in total. Students expressed a wide range of views, but were generally supportive of the changes for various reasons relating both to study and also revision and employment opportunities during the year.

A linked discussion on University Reading Weeks followed as academic departments are currently inconsistent in their approach to timing of, and activities in, these weeks which occur in both the teaching terms. A more consistent approach was requested, as the current arrangements can be disruptive for students, especially if their studies are with more than one department.

4. National Funding Opportunities

The meeting next discussed the impact of withdrawal of specific national funding opportunities for students, specifically the discontinuation of maintenance grants,

in favour of loans, and changes to the disabled students' allowance which will in future be available only to the most severely challenged individuals.

Regarding this change, the University is exploring local ways to support students not considered severely disabled in a wide range of initiatives.

The Vice-Chancellor also advised that he and the Chair of the University Council had taken the opportunity of a meeting with the Minister of State for Universities and Science to express Roehampton's concern about the implications of the cessation of maintenance grants on less well-off students and applicants and widening participation in general.

5. **Off-campus students**

Student Senate then considered how to enhance further **the experience of off-campus students**, who may consider or find themselves left out of events held at the University. Much had been done to improve Roehampton's interaction with those studying here but living offsite (including student-led budget funding for a specific welcome event this year) but it was clear from those present who had lived offsite that experiences, and a sense of belonging to the Roehampton community, had varied. Various methods of ensuring better and regular communication were discussed, and the valuable role of student groups such as the new Postgraduate Society was recognised. The President of RSU encouraged a partnership approach between the University (including individual colleges) and RSU in order to bring off-campus students into the University community.

The RSU President also advised the meeting of views expressed at a recent students' General Meeting, which included concerns - now being addressed - in relation to Chadwick Hall. Other matters raised included reading weeks (see also above) and further extension of 24-hour opening for the University Library, which is extremely popular.

6. **'TOP OF YOUR AGENDA'**

Under this item, student members are each invited to raise matters of current interest to them. Items raised included problems relating to late timetable and module registration changes, and difficulties for students with compulsory teaching sessions on Wednesday afternoons who wanted to engage with sports activities and/or were in University sports teams. Staff present took note of these and other concerns raised by students in order to follow up with colleagues and endeavour to alleviate.

The meeting was pleased to note that RSU had trained more than ever programme representatives. Student members also advised about campaigns to combat food waste at the University, and to counter potential discrimination. Involvement in humanitarian projects was also being encouraged and staff were also able to advise on routes for students to investigate to pursue this.

*Andrew Skinner
University Secretary & Secretary to Student Senate
November 2015*