

UNIVERSITY OF ROEHAMPTON

SENATE

SUMMARY REPORT ON THE LATEST MEETING OF THE STUDENT SENATE

The seventeenth meeting of the University Student Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, was held on Wednesday 24 February 2016.

1. Matters Arising

Before other business, the meeting confirmed the report from the last meeting of Student Senate, which was held in November 2015. It was reported that the University Senate has approved the proposal to restructure the academic year into semesters and that this would take effect from September 2016 with reading and independent study weeks being set by the University and consistent across Departments. It was agreed that the review and outcome was a reflection of the positive involvement of Student Senate.

2. Future Priorities Survey

Senior staff initially led a discussion around the outcome of the Future Priorities Survey, which along with a range of questions, provided the opportunity for free text and comment which had also been analysed. The additional computer spaces at Whitelands and new computers in Southlands were welcomed but it was suggested that when teaching rooms were not in use, these could be clearly shown as available for private or group study space. Investment of £1m had been approved to improve general maintenance of rooms and equipment to help ensure minimum standards which were being set, were met, and provide a better and more professional appearance to the teaching spaces overall. Changes to the way the campus was accessed in the evening would be introduced as part of the post construction work at Digby Stuart and access for visitors would be more closely controlled. Additional security, possibly in the form of additional cctv was suggested for Whitelands, although it was noted that it was the footway between the village and the campus which could feel intimidating and that there were plans for the nearby shops and flats to be redeveloped which would improve the street scene.

3. Student-led budget for 2016-17

Proposals and suggestions were invited for the student-led budget for 2016-17. An email would be sent to Student Senators for a long-list which could be costed and then prioritised at the next meeting. Students were urged to think broadly and make suggestions that would have a wide impact on many students, such as a trial 24 hour opening of the Library which had been judged successful and was now funded from the University budget.

4. Prevent

An update on the University's responsibilities under the Prevent duty was given and it was explained that the University wanted its response to be proportionate in the context of the Roehampton community, and to avoid all forms of discrimination and radicalisation and intolerance. It was felt that the approach should be to review and amend existing policies and procedures rather than to introduce a raft of new ones. A working group which included a range of people, including representatives of staff and students, had been set up and a Risk Assessment would be produced followed by an Action Plan. Student Senate supported a moderate approach to the Prevent agenda, which was neither 'overstated' nor 'understated'. Individual Student Senators expressed a willingness to be involved as members of the working group. Although the Students' Union weren't covered by the legislation, the University and RSU would work closely together on this, and consider the views of the whole student body in progressing the duty. HEFECE would monitor compliance and it was important to be transparent across the University. Key actions would be brought to the next meeting of Student Senate.

5. Departmental Offices

The Registrar asked Student Senators how they would wish to see the way in which Departmental Offices be reframed to better support academic departments. Responses included the need for consistency across Departments, retention of a presence at Whitelands and ideally longer opening hours, accepting that this might only be possible within the context of a reduced number of offices. Students may not use Departmental Offices for hand-in, but valued the opportunity to receive help and support on questions associated with the Programme, including timetabling etc. and it was important that this knowledge continued to be readily available.

6. Attendance Monitoring

A discussion on Attendance Monitoring prompted a wide range of queries which highlighted how important it would be to produce a series of 'FAQs' to support the introduction of the new ID card based system of attendance monitoring. Assurances that attending lectures or the number of occasions the Library was visited would not have an impact on marks was welcomed, but some reservations remained with whether the initiative was for purely statistical purposes, or to support study. Student Senate was assured that the new system was designed to provide the opportunity to re-motivate students where it was noticed that engagement was fading. The system would however also have benefits in linking to other systems which would for example provide notification of cancelled lectures or when rooms were free for private study as display units would also be located outside of rooms.

7. Voter Registration

The way in which voter registration had changed was described and students were encouraged to register to vote at both home and term time addresses. Campaigns to register to vote and to vote in forthcoming London Mayoral elections and the EU Referendum were highlighted as were the benefits of appearing on the Electoral Roll for personal credit rating and local funding calculations. The implications of the UK withdrawing from the EU were outlined in terms of reduction of income for the University and future further study options for UK students who may want to study in the EU.

8. Campaigns

The President of the Students' Union reported on the Union Elections and the matters discussed at a recent General Meeting. The SU was currently visiting the refugee camps in Calais regularly and a Refugee Action Society had been set up. Fundraising at Whitelands College had achieved in excess of £1,000 for War Child, a children's charity.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor spoke about a 'phone app, BOUNTS, which would encourage walking, was free to use and earned participants a vouchers for a range of goods or services. If it was felt that this was something that would interest students, the University could consider a corporate membership which would allow the programme to be tailored for the University.

9. 'Top of Your Agenda

Student members were each invited to raise matters of current interest to them. Items raised included the success of the Black Leaders Conference and thanks due to Siobhan Kelly in this regard, volunteers' efforts to restore the Vatican Garden into a space for contemplation were welcomed as was that in excess of 70 students had attended a social event for postgrad students. It was hoped that this could be repeated and it was important that a space could be made available in the evening therefore. Staff took note of issues related to the boiler operation at Whitelands and requests for space, separate from the health centre to be available for resting and receiving independent advice.

*Alison Bainbridge
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February 2016*