CONSULTATION ON OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION GOVERNANCE REFORMS

25 August to 8 September 2021

The complete record of the discussion can be viewed on the student consultation forum.

Record of contributions

In total there were **40** posts by **9** students out of the **213** registered, with **11** like/favourite ratings. There were at least **47** independent readers of the forum. Below are extracts from the posts.

"I would still like to see roles dedicated to capturing those aspects of university life which affect all students (i.e., welfare, research/internship opportunities, etc.)."

"without full role descriptions it is difficult to know whether you would need a small number of people qualified across a number of areas or alternatively a larger number of people with particular focused skill sets"

"For me, the prerequisite for an AGM would be for all students to have a vote. What happened until now with Conference, was that only students who got a spot at Conference could vote for the Business side of Conference, therefore only a few hundreds of students out of the tens of thousands of OU students."

"Regular press releases from the Student Leadership Committee (SLC) should be prepared and released notifying the students of the work undertaken, the decisions reached and the upcoming work plan. It should be possible for any student to easily communicate to the SLC and its members and to ask questions of the SLC and to receive an answer."

"Perhaps smaller, focused networking events - with accommodation on the main campus or at regional locations - be considered throughout the 2-year period to effect the sort of face-to-face communication which builds communities. Or should shorter events out in the regions without accommodation provided (and thus cheaper) be considered?"

1. Student Leadership Committee

1A: On which of these two principles (portfolio-based or skills-based) would you like to see the Student Leadership Committee composed?

1B: Which portfolios and/or skills do you see as being the most important for effective student leadership?

Summary: The feedback raised points such as the time investment required of students who were committee members:

- One contributor suggested that it would be useful to take into consideration the workload of different posts and the time commitment required of the committee members, and that having role descriptions would clarify these points during elections.
- One contributor saw specific portfolios such as Student Support, Student Community, EDI, and Education as important and would prefer such a portfolio-based approach over a skills-based approach.

2. Student Representation Forum

2A: In other student unions/associations, these type of Student Representation Forums are often a mix of students, eg from different faculties or students with different protected characteristics such as disability, ethnicity and gender. What mix of students would you like to see on the Student Representation Forum in order that your interests can be effectively represented?

2B: How would you like members of the Forum to gather your views and ideas to help inform the work/decisions of the Student Leadership Committee and Student Representative Forum? (examples could be through polls, social media, focus groups, etc)

Summary: The feedback in response to the composition of the Student Representation Forum included different suggestions, such as having places reserved both on the basis of different student groups (such as those studying in the same faculty, living in the same Nation, or sharing a group characteristic such as students with a disability or those who are single parents) and on the basis of different student needs. The feedback around how Forum members could gather student views highlighted the need to reach students using a wide variety of channels/platforms.

- One contributor suggested Forum seats to be reserved to accommodate a good mix of Forum members, and another supported reserving places that enabled better representation of students with protected characteristics.
- The different ways in which student views could be gathered included suggestions around surveys, polls, focus groups, newsletter, social media, notifications on StudentHome, and VLE forums.

3. Scrutiny Panel

3A: How would you like the Student Leadership Committee's work to be scrutinised to ensure transparency and accountability to the student body?

3B: How should the work and impact of the Student Leadership Committee be communicated to the wider student body?

Summary: The feedback on how the SLC's work could be scrutinised raised the importance of ensuring that the student community is aware of Committee meetings, papers and minutes. The feedback on how the SLC's work could be communicated to the wider student body highlighted the need to increase the visibility of the SLC and its work amongst OU students.

- One contributor suggested the recording and/or live broadcasting of Student Leadership Committee meetings, but another disagreed with making these meetings public.
- Other suggestions mentioned practices that are already in place at the Association, such as committee papers and minutes to be shared with the wider student body.
- On how the SLC's work could be communicated to the wider student body, suggestions included increasing the visibility of student representatives within the student body, and also seeking student feedback on their work.

4. New Annual General Meeting Format - Content

4A: What types of business and policy-focussed topics and activities would you like to see included at the new format online Annual General Meeting? Please bear in mind that this would be separate from any face-to-face community building events organised by the Association.

4B: What would encourage you to attend the online Annual General Meeting?

Summary: The key feedback on this thread included questions around student attendees' ability to propose resolutions, having Business items explained in jargon-free language, and whether all students would be able to vote at the AGM.

- Feedback on the types of business/discussions that students would like to see raised the question of whether students attending the AGM would have the ability to propose resolutions for debate during the event.
- Suggestions included ensuring that all business items are presented in an accessible and jargon-free format that can be easily understood by students new to the Association.
- On what would encourage students to attend, feedback included enabling all students to vote at the AGM. Together with opening voting to all students, some contributors wished to retain a face-to-face element for the AGM.

5. New Annual General Meeting Format – Student Engagement

5A: The new format online Annual General Meeting will incur lower costs than the current biennial conference which has an online element alongside the face-to-face activities held at the Open University's campus. How could these cost savings be used in alternative ways to increase student engagement with the Association and build bigger and stronger student communities?

Summary: The feedback on alternative activities/events included suggestions for smaller events paced around the year and at different locations, retaining the face-to-face element.

Other comments outside of the discussion topics:

- Contributors asked for more information around how a student mandate for accepting the recommendations of the Governance Review would be sought.
- Contributors asked for more information about how decision-making would work with the combined Student Leadership Committee and Student Representative Forum, and also how student representatives would be appointed to the Student Representative Forum.
- A question was raised around whether the new format AGM means that the current biennial Conference would be cancelled.
- A question was raised around the consultants that undertook the Culture Review and the Governance Review.
- A question was raised around whether the Student Leadership Committee posts would be paid or not.
- Two contributors shared concerns that the new Student Leadership Committee might place power with just a few Committee members.
- Contributors also mentioned that they would like a more wide-ranging consultation beyond the topics that were discussed during the online consultation.
- One contributor supported the Governance Review recommendation of term limits, noting that it would encourage new students to participate and stand for elections.

The Governance Reforms FAQs on the Students Association website provide further information relevant to some of these queries.

Date: 07/10/2021