

OPEN FORUM PROGRAMME 6 28th. May, 1971.

NOT TRANSMITTED TO THE STUDENTS

JAMES BARBER: Hello and welcome again to Open Forum. In this programme we are going to talk about student participation, and those of you who are students or part-time members of staff, should by now have had a letter which outlines the electoral system which is going to be used for students and part-time members of staff to have representation on some of the governing bodies of the University. Now I think their letter does its best to outline what's a very confused and complex situation, but even so as I say, it is complex and here in the studio with me to help explain this, is Mr. Sam Crooks, who is the administrative assistant responsible for this area's University activity. He says he's one of the two men in the University who understand what it is all about. The other other is Dr. Kenneth Urwin, whose not only the director of the London Region, but also the Chairman of the Committee that't been concerned with student participation. Well, to return to the letter and the whole range of student participation. Sam, can you outline for us, first of all, in what areas students are going to participate.

SAM CROOKS: I think there are three main areas in which they will, the first of which is the governing bodies of the University. The Charter, as you know, which is the University's constitution lays down three governing bodies on which students and part-time staff may have membership. The first of these is the University's

Council which is the supreme governing authority of the University and its main executive. The second is the Senate which looks after the University's academic affairs and both these bodies have been in existence from when the University started. The third of the three bodies I mentioned is called the General Assembly and on the General Assembly there's something like a hundred people and these are drawn from each region. We take five members of the part-time staff and three students from each region and they are elected to the General Assembly and this is a fairly formal body, as you can see, which will meet about once a year.

JAMES BARBER: When you say they are, you mean they will be. We haven't yet had one, have we?

SAM CROOKS: No, the first one's September the 25th., I think.

JAMES BARBER: Whereas the Council and the Senate have operated from the beginning of the University. This we should explain. What about another area in which students will participate?

SAM CROOKS: Well, the second area which supplements this we call our Consultative Committee structure. What we've done is, we've got a pyramid of consultative committees with one central committee, a national

committee, if you like, at the top of the pyramid. Underneath that we've got twelve regional committees, one in each region and underneath that again, we've got 250 study centre committees, one in every study centre.

JAMES BARBER: Can I ask why, um, to explain to people, why it is that we've decided to set up this, the Consultative Committees as well as the formal governing bodies?

SAM CROOKS: Well, I think the key word is formal. We were unhappy that the statutory bodies might be so big and so formal that students would feel they hadn't got effective participation and this is why we felt that the smaller for informal Consultative Committees with students, part-time staff and full-time staff might be a quicker and more effective way of discussing problems of common concern.

JAMES BARBER: And we've still got another area, haven't we?

SAM CROOKS: We have a Student Association on which we are consulting students at the moment. Here I think our concern was that we shouldn't try and impose anything. We shouldn't have a University scheme which students would have to lump or like, so what we're

doing at the moment is, we're getting in contact with students, we've published our wish to hear from the students in the conditional registration booklet; we're going to talk about this with students at summer schools and on the strength of all this we're going to try and put together our estimate of what people want into a Student Association, hopefully sometime in the relatively near future.

JAMES BARBER: Let me try to summarise for everybody then the three broad areas in which we'll have participation. First of all in the formal governing bodies of the University and they consist of the Council and Senate which have been in operation from the beginning of the University and the General Assembly which is yet to be elected and yet to meet. From the next broad area are the consultative committees at central level, at regional level and also at the study centres, and the third area, which is not on the diagram, is one we're going to talk a fair amount about, I hope, in this programme, is the Students Association. Now can you tie these together in any way for us?

SAM CROOKS: Well, my morale is slightly boosted in that you at least think I understand this, but I'll see if I can do it. I think the thing to do, perhaps, is to actually look at the diagram and to pick up you point about the letter which is inviting people to

take part in the first stages of the election or rather, in fact, in three elections; and the first of these is to elect eight people from each region to the General Assembly and the second is to elect twelve members of the part-time staff to the Senate. Here, however, there is an important point; we will see that the second arrow extends from the arrow already there between the General Assembly and the student and part-time staff box. And this is because the one person whom a student will elect from his region to the Senate must have been already amongst the five part-time staff he's just voted onto the General Assembly. The third thing you have to do is to nominate one student and one member of the part-time staff from each region for election by the General Assembly to the Council. But again there's something important here, for students and part-time staff only nominate candidates for election, which is why the arrow is dotted as far as the General Assembly; but it is the Assembly itself which actually makes the election from amongst the nominations it's received. So the arrow going up to the Council is a solid one.

JAMES BARBER: Perhaps we ought to make clear at this point, because the letter which has gone out to students is not in fact a ballot form or anything like that, is it?

SAM CROOKS: No, you're right. It's merely an invitation to the students to make nominations and they have to

get the nomination forms from their regional office. The ballot paper itself is circulated later, in the middle of July sometime and then the votes will be counted at the end of August.

JAMES BARBER: Can we move over now to the other side of the diagram to the committees?

SAM CROOKS: Yes, I think we can start at the bottom with the study centre consultative committees and in each region these committees have to get together and to elect ten people to their regional committee. But the regional committee doesn't only have students on it; it also has members of the part-time staff. Rather than take them out from the study centre as well, though, it's been decided to take the eight representatives from each region to the General Assembly and put them on the regional committee. So, in other words, the regional committee is taking students from study centre level and part-time staff from General Assembly level. There's also a link from the regional committee upwards, because it elects one student to the Central Committee and like the regional committees however, the Central Committee also gets members from other sources. First of all, the people who the General Assembly have elected to the Council are on it and secondly there are also on it five members of the Senate who are full-time members of the academic staff. So it's quite a big committee as you can see.

JAMES BARBER: Well, thank you. I confess until the arrows started I thought I was going to be the third member of the University who understood the system, but having watched it on a monitor as the arrows have been coming round, I don't think I am. But could I throw it open now to people to ask are there any questions that you would like to raise, either for in general terms, or from the diagrams that we've seen?

KENNETH PALMER: Er, yes, it seems to me that the carts coming before the horse a bit, it seems as though the, this elaborate system is being set up before the Student Association comes into being. I think there's going to be a lack of communication between students that might be confronted with a ballot paper and just won't know who the names are, who to vote for.

DR. KENNETH URWIN: This is true. That part is true. Clearly they won't know er, very many of the students, but I think possibly you are confusing two things. After all, there are a large number of grievances and a large number of very bright ideas floating around at the moment and which do need to be fed into the University for us to see whether anything can be done about them and we can't really wait until a students' union is formed. Equally, of course, we're not sure there's going to be a students' union or students' association, we still don't know the students answer to this, but I think too there is this point that I see a student as

being able to wear two hats. Sometimes he can be a reasonable, practical study centre user and other occasions

(an unreasonable one)

he can be an unreasonable idealist who's asking rightly for the earth and that is where I see the student association - seeking the ideal as opposed to this consultative group which is prepared to compromise with realities, particularly financial realities.

JOHN FALKNER: Don't you think that the whole idea of an election at the moment is too soon, because so many of us haven't studied for so long that all our time is taken up in study. We just haven't got the time to worry about electing students, part-time staff onto these committees.

SAM CROOKS: Isn't this almost exactly why in fact you want these committees, so that you can put this point of view. One of the reasons we were so anxious to get them established right at the very start of the University's existence was so that students and part-time staff could have this very quick and very easy method of communication through which they could put exactly the kind of problem you've been describing.

KENNETH PALMER: But instead of having an election to these big bodies, let's try and get the student association

started then we can start pushing things through. It's so much easier to work on a local level, first of all than to try and work beyond this.

PETER MINGAY: Yes, this point of a local level is very important, I think it's going to be quite difficult to run a students' association on a national level. I think probably in the first instance a sort of regional committee with er, that could be er, formed from the er, from the regions and er, there wouldn't be this kind of communication problem that there is to communicate with the whole of the sort of, you know, the whole of the set-up in the Open University.

When you say regions, do you really mean regions or do you mean study study centre or very local level or...

PETER MINGAY: I mean regional level; perhaps linked with local radio or something.

KENNETH PALMER: I'd like to come down to the study centre level first of all; let's get this organised (PETER MINGAY: First of all yes.) and then we can begin to affiliate.

SONIA COPELAND: Well, I would have been interested in participating in all this until I saw the diagram, because it seems to me that er, it involves hundreds of meetings all, here, throughout the year on these

different councils and assemblies, etc. I mean you know how many students are really going to be prepared to do this and can you give us any indication of how much of our time it'll take?

PETER MINGAY: It seems to me that this is the whole idea of this diagram, it's to bamboozle everybody into thinking that something is being done, when actually nothing is being done at all. I mean, Sam Crooks talks about being in contact with students about the students' association, but that's a prevarication because that's the first time I've heard of Sam Crooks' name and I've been involved in some way or other with students' association formation for several months, you know. Every time we speak to anybody about anything it's "oh, yes, something's being done about it", but, er, there's the committees, you know, they'll go to the committees and they'll pass them up to the next level and there, that's where it'll stay.

DR. KENNETH URWIN: This is a misunderstanding of the levels. There are, obviously, somethings which affect just the local study centre, they can be dealt with at that level. There are other things which apply pretty generally throughout a region, but not throughout the country, they can be dealt with at the regional level. My impression is that this is likely to meet ^{not much} more than three or four times a year, so there isn't a vast amount of time involved and then there are things which

will have to be passed up, for the very simple reason that they really apply on a national scale and only the University as a whole can cope with it.

FREDERICK BEGBIE: I think there's a tendency perhaps to confuse the roles of the consultative committee and the students' association. I see them as quite separate. (So do I.)

We in Edinburgh, we set up a small sub-committee to look into this and it would appear that at other Universities the students' association has two roles. One is representation of the students to the University authorities. The other role, the other aspect is social, cultural, recreational. Now, in the Open University there seems to me that we're very lucky. The consultative committees are an ideal avenue for representation on administrative or organisational matters to the University authorities. On academic matters we have our counsellors and our tutors. All our problems can go through them again right back to the Bletchley, and we're getting answers back so the things working.

If you think that a committee is a means to an end in this day and age, you're living in a false dream world because once you get into a committee it goes on to another committee and it ends up with a dead end.

FREDERICK BEGBIE: But we're getting results.

EDWARD DWYER: the recreation of the committees here is surely what would happen is that the same students who are on the consultative committee at regional and study centre level are going to be the same people who are on this students' association committees.

Could I pick up here. I think, you see, we've been accused of bamboozling students by Mr. Palmer and you rightly say that there's proliferation of committees, I think as we outlined on the diagram, some we are obliged to have under the charter. We, we're, we established the university under a charter which says "you will have these" and they were not really very carefully worked out on the ground. We're obliged by the charter to establish this. We've also, I think, as Sam Crooks explained, um, quite carefully, said we're establishing consultative committees which we hope will be more active and alive. Now is this bamboozling, you see we've been accused of it, but I don't think we should let accusation drop. Do the rest of you feel, we're off to bamboozle you?

JOHN FALKNER: I don't think you're trying to bamboozle. What I think is happening is that, if we go back to forming these committees, forming associations, at S₀lihull we've had so much apathy from the other students, we

put out an open letter to all the students of the Solihull centre that we were going to have a meeting to discuss formation of the students' association. Out of eighty students we got sixteen. I think something like ten of those were maths students who were almost coerced to come from one room where we were having this meeting and they're just not interested, so if they're not interested at local level are they going to be interested over this larger area. I don't think so.

Can I ask, why you think there's apathy then?

JOHN FALKNER: Well, I know one of the reasons why there's apathy at Solihull is because of the lack of facilities, there's nothing there at all. I mean, we're in a school where we're using children's chairs and children's tables and we're almost, we are there on sufferance. Nobody can argue this.

But dash it, this is the sort of thing that consultative committees exist for, or will exist for. We could bring this sort of thing to the level at which it could be dealt with.

It is a vicious circle though, isn't it? This is going on....

May I take that..... I wanted to take up the point of, I think it's Mr. Mingay, isn't it, and you were saying that we put the cart before the horse. Well, I would agree with you on this and so I very definitely think we've got to start at the grass roots level of forming local associations. Once we've found out ourselves rather than leaving it to father to manipulate us, I think we'll then find that we'll have a really active representation on these consultative committees.

I think the apathy is something you've got to live with. I think you've got to accept that there is going to be a hell of a lot of people that just really don't want to be involved in the running of students' union, students' association or any kind of representative committees. I thin you've just got to live with this and accept this, but I don't think it should stop the forming of an association, I think it should be a constructive association that really offers some kind of benefits to its members

I think these benefits should be directly concerned with helping the student to complete his course successfully. We think of students unions in terms of leisure activities, like drama as one example. Now if students are prepared to take part in dramatic activity, I don't see any reason why they shouldn't actually be given credit for this. Now this will also help

I don't see why this shouldn't encourage course foundation between science, maths, humanities, and so forth, because you just cannot do this unless you have the time to do it, and we do not have the time to do it.

I'de like to bring one point, I did notice when you were talking about the chart, you didn't say anything about the student from the senate.

No, there arn't in fact any studets from the senate. It's just part time staff, one for each region.

Well, I find that extrordinary in progressive University like the Open University and other universities fighting to get students onto senate, why have we not?

Well here again, of course, we are governed by the charter, and we are working under the provisions of what the charter the membership that we have been given in the charter, for the senate. This can obviously be changed, but it's a long and lengthy process to do so, and it certainly can't be done over night.

But if we take the stages of a decision, if the students for instance, want to change something quite large, couldn't the whole decision get

held up at the senate, and there are no students on the senate to do this, so

It get's to the senate and thats where it starts, and the senate says, well, never mind what you think - this is what we're going to do.

Why do you suspect such bad motives in every move that we make?

Because nothing has been done up to now to encourage or develope the various ideas that have been put forward,

How long have we been operating?

Long enough. You see six months we've been in operation and in fact, we have only now laid down - we've said, here you are. Here's a range of things in which you can participate. You come back and say, no - it's a bit of a plot this.

I'm not a paid member of the Open University, but I think this is a bit unfair to level with such I think we've got to put our own house in order first. We've got to start these associations ourselves, amongst ourselves. Now, I'm perfectly certain there are a many number of good things we can do. If we only consider within our area, bringing in any disabled people into the students centres. Picking

them up in our car. If there are any other people that find..... finding them out. This body really has got to consider its finances, and we ourselves can do it if we are really going to be alive.

I still think its bad psychology to have one important committee, where there aren't any students, because even though you might say, well you don't understand the role of the senate. you know, how are we going to understand it if we don't know what goes on there?

I don't disagree with you. What I am saying is, first of all let's get ourselves organised and then go along and say to the senate - look here we are. We are organised now, we want somebody on.

The senate, will before very long be a body of about 350 people, so if you have students on it, they will in fact be learning a great deal I suppose, about senate themselves, but, they are not going to be sufficient numbers to be able to bulldoze a point through. I'm not opposed to having them on - I'm merely trying to put it in the context of size as to whether it's vitally important that you have them.

Just as long as we have, say one or two from each faculty, who knows what's going on and if something seems very wrong, the staff are completely different from the students in this sort of organisation. I think their contribution could be very

useful.

I think the contribution could be very useful.

I think the consultative machinery is so elaborate, I think you can put the emphasis on the top committee.

I'm a bit worried about how this conversation is going so far, because I thought we came to talk about not the senate, but about students association. But we've had no apathy there. As a matter of fact we are going to have to widen our committee because we feel that we are getting feedback on this.

I think the emphasis should be based on the study centre and a regional committee, because this is where the problems will be solved. We talk about senate as an example. In Northern Ireland we have the problem of the Summer schools. I feel that if we had had an association from earlier, we could have solved this. Now we are left with, in a position where we have to book in advance before we can actually apply to Summer school. Well, at the Open University they give us priority, but this is not normal amongst students, and they were quite concerned about this, and I think this sort of problem should have been made much more widely known through the students associations.

Again, I don't think this is a
..... I think this is a roll of the
..... in the study centres, in the regions which
have these problems. Instead, to have a Open
University association open to students and to staff
who and later years to graduates of the
University. This association would be social, cultural
in its activities in the type of thing which it could
organise, would be a student magazine. Concession of
travel facilities, for students and perhaps for staff
as well. One thing which we are thinking about in
Edinburgh at the moment is some social function in late
November, early December to which we would invite
applications for starting in 1972, so that we
could all meet staff and students.

I think that you've got to start
first of all at the study centres. You may conceivably
start at the regional centre and branch out. We are
beginning to think in Manchester. We are just getting
together. We are beginning to think that there will be
in the North region, say centres in Liverppol, and in
Preston and Manchester. These will be divisions of
what will then become a regional association. And from
their we will have eventually, delegates would move to
a national association, so there would be a pyramid
eventually.

In each local area a different type of association will form and it will be difficult to

They will be electing delegates to regional assembly. You mention that you feel that tutors should come in on it. Now our tutor, in Social Sciences, Dr. states that he thinks that they should stay out of it. This is a students association, and I tend to agree with him, because this is something we've got to do for ourselves. If they keep coming in to it, we are going to try and stop everything. They are in contact. Let's do it for ourselves.

We just can't communicate with other students. Is there a possibility that local radio could be used by some means?

What about the reaction of a newspaper?

I edit for the University of Kent, a rather unique magazine in which everybody on the whole campus has their say, and I'm a journalist not, I'm employed by the University to produce this magazine, and in fact its very popular and everybody writes all their problems and writes in and we have a whole lot of things discussed, and for me staff, students and the whole campus is on an equal basis, and in fact this is the sort of thing I think the Open University perhaps should have already brought out, because for instance,

we saw a little magazine for staff tutors, and we all jumped on this. All wondering if we could find some of the answers that so many

We started off in this programme by talking about the students participation and the elections which are to be held, and then we've ranged over a fairly wide area. We've raised quite a lot of sharp points in this programme. I hope its going to encourage people at study centres and also at the Summer schools when you come together with them, to go on discussing the points that we've raised. I also hope that you will be joining us in the next Open Forum which is on the first Sunday of next month. And so until then - goodbye.