

OPRs and Periodic Reviews

Since the last Council meeting, I have almost completed the Operational Performance Review cycle for this year, with the Library and Life Sciences OPRs in the last three weeks. Unfortunately I was ill on the day of the Library OPR, but I did send in comments and issues, which were raised by the panel and I will be chasing up. The three main issues I raised were 24-hour opening and the availability of computers and textbooks: I asked for a feasibility study to be undertaken regarding costing and planning of year-round 24-hour access, and for maps of alternative computer clusters in other buildings to be placed in overcrowded library clusters like Blue 1. Availability of core texts is a resource issue: there just isn't the money (or room) to keep enough core texts but the library are trying various initiatives to combat this, including digitising many more resources and hiring e-book readers to certain pilot schools.

I also sat as the student representative on the five-yearly periodic review of the BSc Speech & Language Therapy programme, which took an entire day plus many hours of reading beforehand. I consulted with students and made sure that their issues were raised, and many points I brought up in this review will be in the final report and recommendations to the programme team.

These reviews are more than just long meetings with lots of reading: they are the most important thing that I do for a number of reasons. Firstly, part of the Union's "deal" with the University to get the funding they give relies on us sending a rep to these reviews. Secondly, they give me a really in-depth knowledge of what's actually happening in different parts of the university and the ability to compare and contrast practice. Finally, these reviews are the fastest way to really achieve change for students on the ground: not often does a student get to grill a Head of School on why they're not delivering for students, with the full support of Alan Gilbert sat next to you!

Course Reps

My Union Link policy was passed by TLG on 9th November, with rollout imminent. As of this week or next, I will be emailing all the course reps in five pilot schools asking them to apply to be a Union Link. This position is sort of a "Head Rep" role, to give better links between myself and the issues faced by each School, and requires monthly meetings with me (or a monthly report if unable to meet) in order to receive an honorarium. The University has agreed to fund this for the whole institution next year (to the tune of £4600) provided the pilot scheme shows real benefits to students, which I certainly hope it will!

General Representation

I have continued to represent the student voice on a number of committees:

TLG (Teaching & Learning Group) – passes academic policy before official seal at Senate. I have attended all these meetings (except for 9th November when I was ill) and commented on various proposals, as well as drafting a Union Link proposal to take to 9th November TLG. This motion was passed subject to minor amendments (see Course Reps section).

I also attended a special TLG, which was for the purpose of Annual Monitoring – it summarised overarching themes from the OPRs and we gained an external perspective on certain issues. We also approved an action plan for central T&L activity for the coming year.

TLG subgroups – there are 5 working groups that I sit on which have been recently set up to look at various issues:

- **Assessment & Feedback** – looking at implementing a university-wide feedback policy, as well as a review of the marking system (e.g. should we mark in percentages or bands?)
 - Myself and Gabriel organised two consultation sessions with students to feed into this group: the first was disappointingly attended and at time of writing I haven't heard back from the second. I would like to stress that all of Council were given individual invites and chased up by phone (thanks Gabriel), taking up a lot of our time which could have been spent doing more representational issues. I hope Council took the opportunity to feed into a consultation on an issue continually raised as being high priority by the students they represent.
- **Attendance Monitoring** – looking at whether certain portions of courses should be compulsory and attendance monitored, and looking at implementing a university policy

- **Credit Framework** – looking at the structure of credits and how they build up into courses, with a view to making the credit framework more flexible
- **Degree Regulations** – how a final degree classification is awarded/calculated – level of flexibility to permit, as well as looking at the appropriateness of the current classification system
- **Portfolio Review** – looking at the appropriateness of the portfolio of degrees offered by the University

Faculty T&L Committees (4) – keep me updated on changes being made in each Faculty with regard to teaching and learning. I frequently suggest amendments to proposals and participate in discussions to ensure that the student voice is listened to. I also meet frequently with the Associate Deans for T&L (especially in EPS and Humanities) to give input on proposed changes or problems.

Student Services Centre Review Group – looking at how effective the SSC is currently and how it could be restructured to better meet students' needs. I will be helping the university to run a survey of students in the next few weeks.

Learning Commons Core Group – looking at the design of the Learning Commons, the facilities within it and the space available for students. At this meeting it was determined that I would help organise a consultation with students on what they want the café to be like.

Unit Evaluation Questionnaire (UEQ) Working Group – looking at the current questionnaire given out at the end of a unit and trying to improve it. Currently looking at an online pilot and deciding on questions.

Audit Report, Governance and SUEI

I am on the SUEI steering group, and as such have devoted a fair amount of time to SUEI related things. I attended the 4.5 hour SUEI conference, where we developed a plan to take the scheme forward as there were concerns that the process had ground to a halt, and that the steering group were overburdened whilst other staff were completely disengaged from it. This was helped somewhat by a visit from our SUEI contact, who explained a bit more about it to staff and officers who had been uninvolved up to that point.

Governance-wise, I filled in Gabriel's questionnaire about exec roles and was the only member of Council to attend the final consultation on the Strategic Plan (except Gabriel who hosted it). I assume it will be passed unanimously, as nobody offered comments or criticisms.

We have also received the audit report, which I spent a fair amount of time reading, as well as talking with exec about the findings and helping Gabriel to draft an exec proposal asking for a written response from management.

Internal Relations – The University

Outside of formal committee structures, I have regular meetings with key university staff to stay updated on various issues and flag up concerns from the student body. Recently I have met with:

General Assembly – I was asked to give a presentation to General Assembly about the NSS, as well as issues affecting student satisfaction more generally. The presentation was well received and helped to highlight to stakeholders the problems students have with the university. The issue of poor quality teaching space was raised, as it has been in other meetings, and is an issue I will really be pushing over the coming months.

The President & Vice Chancellor – he meets with exec every 6 weeks or so. This time I brought up the lack of student representation on Professional & Support Services OPR, and this is being addressed. I also gave an update on the progress with student consultations on feedback.

Colin Stirling (VP T&L) – discussing OPRs and General Assembly presentation.

Humanities T&L Office staff – discussing an upcoming satisfaction survey they will be running and writing a preamble to said survey.

Karen Badat, Student Experience Office – regarding help promoting the NSS 2010. As a result of this meeting I drafted a proposal to exec about union support and active promotion of the NSS.

Jonathan Davies, Wireless Project Manager – invited me to sit on the University's Wireless Project Board to give input on which university buildings should be prioritised for getting wireless access. The Students' Union is number one priority (yay) and should be done by Christmas.

Other stuff

I held an open meeting with North Campus students, which although poorly attended was useful and I received good feedback from students to follow up on. I am considering making these meetings weekly, and will better publicise them.

I wrote a debate piece on the NUS Blueprint for Student Direct.

I scheduled in meetings between the President and students from each individual School: I will be attending the vast majority of these over the coming months.

I attended "Enhancing the Student Experience" conference in London, which was really interesting and useful, with lots of very high-profile (well, in the HE sector) speakers.

I visited the University of Aberdeen to talk to their Student Association President about their recent curriculum reform and the general feelings from students about the project. The University of Manchester are considering reforming the curriculum in a similar way, and this trip was extremely useful as we found out what was really going on, without the gloss and spin inevitably put on it by the University! (Please note, the University paid for my travel and food expenses, so no cost to the Union incurred).

I have received and responded to various individual student requests and queries, and am in the process of following up a few issues from the North Campus meeting I held.