

Get a comfy seat and a cup of tea, this will take a while!

### OPRs

Operational Performance Reviews (OPRs) are annual, comprehensive reviews of performance. They last four hours each, and involve substantial amounts of pre-reading and preparation. There is one for each Faculty, as well as shorter ones for the Library, Professional Services and the Museum and Art Gallery.

At Faculty level, they're an opportunity for the University's Senior Management Team (the Vice Chancellor, Deputy VC and the Vice Presidents) to really get into the detail of faculties' performance over the last academic year. This year, the focus has been on Teaching and Learning, with each School asked to produce a summary and an action plan of how they will improve the student experience over the coming year. As the student representative at these meetings, it's been a great opportunity to raise issues of concern and ask questions of each Head of School. As well as reading the Schools' and Faculties' submissions, I also consulted course reps during their training and looked at NSS data and comments to make sure I had a decent overview of how things are in each School.

My questions and comments mostly focused on feedback – timing, quality, personalisation and availability. I also commented on issues surrounding academic support, staff training and attitude towards students, issues of identity and communication/consultation with students. It's hugely beneficial to be able to ask these sorts of questions of Heads of School and Deans of Faculty while the Vice Chancellor is there to hear the answers, and notes are being taken to create a formal report of the meeting and its recommendations.

Following up from the OPRs, myself and Colin Stirling (VP Teaching & Learning) will be writing to individual Schools with a more comprehensive recommendation of how they should be improving student satisfaction. This should be a way of facilitating real change, and quickly: it's very useful that the Union and University are on the same page!

### Course Reps

For the whole of October myself and Charlotte (Union Training & Development Coordinator) have been training course reps on an individual School basis. We don't have figures yet on how many we trained, but anecdotally it was more than last year! We will also be holding extra training sessions in November for any reps who were elected late or couldn't attend previously. We've had positive feedback from most of the reps who said it was useful, as well as constructive criticism from postgrad reps (whose structures we don't know a lot about). This feedback will affect the design of the course for next year.

I have been tweaking the Union Links proposal taken to exec in order to take it to TLG. I have organised speakers for five course rep events based around NSS themes, and will continue to plan these over the next few months. I collected feedback from course reps at training on what was good and bad about their School, as well as suggestions for improvement. I used this to back up my arguments in the OPRs.

### Town Takeover



At the time of writing, Town Takeover is about to kick off and hopefully by the time you read this it will have gone well! Organising the stunt and debate for Town Takeovers has involved an immense amount of work by myself and the Campaigns Officer, in conjunction with NUS, Salford Union and MMUnion. I've been mostly responsible for organising the town hall debate, so getting a list of recommended speakers to NUS; visiting the venue and sorting out flyers, etc. I've also done a lot of online promotion for the event through Facebook and Twitter. Laura and I attended a meeting in Liverpool to hear their thoughts on how Liverpool's TT went, which was useful. I invited lots of senior university officials to the debate, but they all declined. I have also painted a banner and a wall of debt, as well as making t-shirts for Laura's stunt and filming a viral video.

The week after TT, there will be another debate in the students' union. The Challenging Orthodoxies Society has booked the room, but I have been responsible for everything else to do with the event. At time of writing, I have confirmed Aaron Porter from NUS and Ed Maltby from the "Education Not For Sale" organisation. I have approached the CBI, 1994 Group and Russell Group but have had no luck getting a third speaker as yet.

## Media Appearances

Related to Town Takeovers and the funding debate more broadly, I have made several media appearances talking about the issue. As well as giving Student Direct several quotes, a letter and a feature article (coming soon), I have appeared on Channel M, Radio Manchester Radio 5 and BBC Breakfast News. The BBC Breakfast appearance was a broader-based interview on the topic of quality and value for money in HE, with specific reference to the law school protests last year. The clips can be seen on my Facebook profile, if you want to check what I said!

## General Representation

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

**Senate** – largely a formalising process for me, as my regular meetings with Colin Stirling and involvement with other committees and OPRs mean I am largely up to date with what goes to Senate. Student reps on Senate are often called on by the VC to give an opinion on contentious proposals. From the next Senate, I will arrange a pre-meeting with the four other reps so that we are all on the same page: the only reason this was not done for 4<sup>th</sup> November was the short time between election of reps and the timing of the meeting.

**TLG (Teaching & Learning Group)** – passes academic policy before official seal at Senate. I have attended all these meetings and commented on various proposals, as well as drafting a Union Link proposal to take to 9<sup>th</sup> November TLG.

**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?)
- **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.

**Learning Commons Core Group** – looking at the design of the Learning Commons, the facilities within it and the space available for students. I have had input on the technology to be available, as well as disabled access issues and more general design and layout.

**Exchange Project Board** – implementing the university's new email system. I mostly just make sure everything's going OK and I've had a play with the new Outlook Live platform. It also gives me chance to have words with the Director of IT Services, who called me when Blackboard went down recently to explain what was being done and how he was communicating with students.

**Student Portal Advisory Group** – I am the student rep on the board overseeing the Student Portal. So far I have raised issues of the Portal being down or slow, and given input on proposed changes and how they might be received by students.

**University-Union Liaison Forum** – formal meeting to go over the budget.

## External relations – NUS and others

I attended NUS HE Zone Conference, where I attended several workshops on various HE issues including funding, league tables and "students as consumers". This was useful and gave me more insight into the wider perspective that my work feeds into.

I organised and attended an Aldwych Group meeting here in Manchester. The Aldwych Group are the students' unions of the Russell Group, so it's useful to network with officers from similar unions to ourselves to share best practice. This session was on postgraduate engagement and was interesting.

Liaising with other unions was also a natural part of Town Takeovers, where we interacted with local students' unions, Liverpool students' unions and NUS.

### **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:

*Colin Stirling (VP T&L)* – discussing OPRs, student satisfaction and concerns with various Schools. I also met with the Head of Materials and the Head of Medicine at two of these meetings.

*Chris Davies (AD T&L Humanities) and Tony Brown (AD T&L EPS)* to discuss concerns raised at TLCs as well as student satisfaction issues in their Faculty.

*Jan Wilkinson (Director of JRUL)* – discussed the refurbishment and its effect on students; computer cluster issues; provision of core texts and 24-hour opening. I also raised the issue of the Muriel Stott Graduate Centre, which I had received complaints about from students.

*TLSO (Teaching & Learning Support Office)* – I regularly meet with them to discuss course rep training and policy, as well as organising focus groups of students for various groups to consult.

*Humanities New Academics Programme* – not a person, but a course! I was asked to design and deliver a presentation to new academics in Humanities on 4<sup>th</sup> November on how to communicate with students and use their feedback to change/inform course delivery. It's a great opportunity to really highlight the importance of student consultation and shows how good the relationship between the Union and particularly this Faculty is.