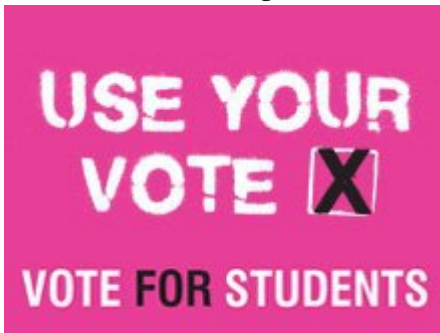


Major news

The two big pieces of news since the last quorate meeting are probably the announcement of the general election, and HEFCE's budget allocations for 2010-11. With regard to the cuts to teaching budgets, Manchester has got off fairly lightly with an overall cut of £120,000 (0.1%), which means that there is no excuse for any decline in the quality of provision to students. I wrote to Alan Gilbert the day the cuts were announced asking that he release a statement ensuring the student experience would be protected, which is on the inside cover of this month's Uni Life. I've also appended it to this report.

The General Election being called means I have stepped up my work on NUS' Vote for Students campaign, where parliamentary candidates pledge to vote against any rise in tuition fees in the next Parliament, and students pledge to vote for candidates who have signed the Pledge. Over 800 candidates have signed, and Manchester is the tenth highest Union in the country for numbers of



signups to voteforstudents.co.uk (as of 21st April). Most of the work on this campaign has been online, but I will be attending the election hustings on Monday with a nice big copy of the Pledge and some leaflets to encourage both candidates and the audience to sign up!

OPRs and Periodic Reviews

I attended the Periodic Review of Manchester Enterprise Centre, and have reviews of the Business School and Life Sciences coming up. Lots of paperwork.

President's Meetings with Schools

The Vice Chancellor is holding a meeting with students in every School to share any issues they're having. I attend all of these and take notes, so I know what's going on in each School and can feed this into other meetings. Over the summer I plan to use this information as part of a "knowledge base" of everything we know about each School, to make my successors' jobs easier!

Mechanical Engineering: the fallout

Some of you may have read in the national press that Mechanical Engineers at Manchester have had some problems related to their course. These are being sorted by the University and by all accounts things are improving. Unfortunately, however, the press has been less than kind (and less than factual) when covering the issue and another group of students directly blamed me for this. Whilst I refute any accusations that I "court" the press or was in any way responsible for the coverage, I recognise that their anger, whilst misplaced, is legitimate. To this end, myself and the Dean of EPS will meet with these students next week to discuss their concerns.

General Representation

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

Teaching & Learning Group – I attended the March and April meetings. The April meeting covered the library's new reading list strategy, which has been spurred on by the motion I submitted to the last General Meeting about more books in the library.

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.

Learning Commons Core Group – has recently produced a report on the progress made so far, which I read. I also attended a consultation with students on the proposed café.

Timetabling Review Group – looks at timetabling and quality of teaching space. I spent a lot of time gathering students' views and issues with timetabling, getting 79 responses to a form I circulated to course reps. I then manipulated all the raw data into handy tables and graphs, and created a 13-page report which I submitted to this committee. Several of the recommendations are already being looked at for implementation, and much of what I gathered will be in the committee's final recommendations to Senate. This is a large piece of research which shows the

Union's capabilities and capacity for influence based on consultation: hopefully soon I may get the staff support to allow me to do more!

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:

Global Leadership Board – major stakeholders and philanthropic donators to the University. I gave a frank presentation with Colin Stirling on the University's poor NSS results and general feeling amongst the student body.

Student Support Forum – I gave a presentation on what the Union is and how we can help staff in Schools, e.g. with advice and representation for their students; improving rep systems in Schools and promoting the Union.

UCU – a trade union representing some lecturers. Most of exec attended a hastily called meeting where they outlined their position on cuts and the Teaching Profiling Exercise.

Joyce Wolfson – is rewriting a policy for the University on PGR representation and wanted my views. I fed in my recent discussions with a PGR student on the issue of supervision.

Marcia Ody, TLSO – organised a consultative meeting on PGT student support, which I attended and noted several things to feed into the MBS periodic review.

External relations – NUS etc

NUS Conference – I attended this as a delegate. I amended two education-related motions, both of which passed into national policy (yay!). Amongst (a lot) of other things, NUS will have to do some work on assessment practices and percentage marking, as well as ensuring that relevant officers receive training in preparation for QAA audit. Yes, fascinating stuff.

Aldwych Group – I attended the recent meeting in Cardiff which focused on widening participation and medical students. Several issues seem to be shared across Russell Group institutions, and I've been inspired to take a longer look at widening participation over the coming months.

Other stuff

I consulted with officers at other unions about whether they were involved in the recruitment of senior staff such as the Vice Chancellor, and produced a briefing for Gabriel to take to meetings and argue the case. As a result of this, and Gabriel's work and persistence, the Union is now represented on the recruitment for the new Vice Chancellor. (Hooray!) I also drafted a couple of questions to ask the potential VCs.

I wrote an article for Student Direct on the importance of teaching compared to research, and the future of the University under a changed leadership.

I read over and suggested amendments for MHS's new policy on social networking.

I updated the education section of the website.

I posed naked with the rest of exec for RAG's naked calendar...a moment I drink to forget.

Lots of reading to stay up to date: HE Academy's end of year report; NUS' Project: Participation; University's Policy on Supervision for Research Degrees

I have followed up various queries from students and sorted a few individual issues.

Appendix: Prof Alan Gilbert's letter in Uni Life

The University of Manchester has many priorities, but none is higher than the absolute imperative to transform the quality of the undergraduate education we offer.

In the middle of 2007, as many readers of the column will know, I instigated a major Review of Undergraduate Education in the University. The Review called for a root-and-branch reappraisal of all our curricula; a much more purposeful approach to identifying and developing in our

students the kinds of professional and personal qualities and skills that are the hallmarks of outstanding graduates; a decisive move away from passive teaching to more personalised, highly interactive learning environments; and a commitment to ensuring that students received relevant, constructive, timely feedback on all the work they submit for assessment.

The Review also recognised the need for more world class teaching space, especially teaching laboratories, workshops and lecture theatres, but also much more informal learning space where students can have 24-hour access to IT support, learning materials and facilities for group work in a safe, comfortable environment.

We are at present building just such a “Learning Commons” adjacent to the Student Union and the University Library.

Yet for all the progress that has been made since mid-2007, the results have been very slow to show up in student satisfaction surveys.

At one level, this is understandable, because the major Survey - the National Student Survey (NSS) - is administered only to final year students, so changes introduced to improve the learning experiences of first year students may take several years to impact on the NSS.

At another level, however, other factors may be at work. Students have sometimes expressed suspicion about the Undergraduate Education Review itself. In written comments submitted with completed NSS Forms, many have complained that academic staff often seem to give much higher priority to their research than to their teaching responsibilities and their support for student learning.

Unfortunately, in a few cases academics have reinforced this message by confirming that their priorities do indeed lie with their research, or by exemplifying the preference by giving only secondary attention to student issues.

The great majority of academic teachers are profoundly committed to their students, many are inspiring lecturers and most are generous in their willingness to make time for individual students.

It takes but a few negative experiences, however, for students to feel alienated and unsupported in a large and impersonal learning environment.

We therefore want to make two very clear commitments to all our students:

1. That the entire purpose of the Review of Undergraduate Education is to benefit students and to improve the Manchester learning experience profoundly, and that *as changes are introduced to implement planned improvements there will not under any circumstances be any transfer of human or financial resources away from undergraduate education to any other function in the University.*

2. That the University will seek by all means possible *to embed parity of esteem between research and undergraduate education as a bedrock principle informing the management and direction of the University.*

We are making good progress. The key strategies for improvement tend to have medium to long-term lead times. But the University is well down the track with deeply significant improvements - and we will see this transformational agenda through.