

Report to Union Council – Postgraduate and Mature Students’ Officer

Union strategic plan

I have been involved in the formulation of the draft Union strategic plan for the next five years, in particular with pulling the various themes together into an appropriate format, helping with the design of challenging targets, and developing the accountability section. Developing a multi-year strategic plan in the context of new leadership for the Union every year has been a challenge; making it specific enough to remain useful, yet not binding on a future executive and council to allow for flexibility.

Students’ Union evaluation initiative

I am part of the working group overseeing this – rating our performance in a wide number of areas against targets set by SUEI, and developing action plans to improve our work in areas where we are underperforming. To date our work has come along slowly and we are still in the rating stage.

Union governance

As part of the Charity Commission’s requirements to register formally as a charity, we must change our constitution, as some of it is not compliant with what is expected. I am part of the group doing this work. The draft constitutions developed by NUS and the Charity Commission still leave the Union a large amount of flexibility to determine things such as executive positions, council positions, policy-making systems, and elections, and I think it is right that we use this opportunity to consider whether what we currently have is appropriate and ensure that in the future there is the appropriate level of flexibility to change it if it turns out not to be at a later date.

Teaching and learning

I am involved in many of the University’s committees and working groups as the postgraduate representative. In all of the meetings I attend I take the opportunity to highlight current issues affecting students and to challenge University staff to involve students more in decision-making – not just elected Union officers but all students, through focus groups and surveys.

I am pleased to have attended three high-level University focus groups already, looking in particular at assessment and feedback, and have several more in my diary. I have also been pushing for open meetings between Heads of School and both undergraduate and postgraduate students in a school, and am pleased that the University’s senior executive are now implicitly recognising this as best practice. I am also arranging a meeting with the University’s Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education to discuss these issues.

Student representatives

In conjunction with the Academic Affairs Officer, I have organised two meetings for postgraduate taught and postgraduate research representatives looking at the poorest-rated aspect of their student experience, which is assessment and feedback and supervision respectively.