

Sorry – this is a somewhat last minute report as I've been very busy running around and nearly missed the deadline. But I found some time.

Trainings

With the success of the Spring Training fortnight I began to organise some more training sessions in some new as yet under-developed skills such as Project Planning and Widening Participation. Needless to say, I had the last laugh. I am still researching the 'Widening Participation' area to attempt to formulate a comprehensive and useful handover of my experience in this area, focusing on recruitment of volunteers and mentoring, reaching new people etc. It's a tough subject to tackle for all societies and groups but a vitally important one. So... these will soon materialise in the form of TUESDAY TRAININGS (4pm MR1) Look out for them!

Unfortunately, the First Aid training area seems to have hit a dead end. I have been shopping around but have been (as yet) unable to source a decent accredited first-aid course which would be both practical and affordable for the average student or society. The university currently offers free accredited training in this area, but to a severely limited number of students each year. The main problem is the question of where should money come from to make this sort of thing free. All of the training sessions provided so far I have recruited volunteers, with levels of expertise in their area of training – even if they don't have expertise in training itself, and supported them through planning and delivering a handover of their knowledge and experience. Finding money to pay trainers, or charging individuals attending training large amounts of money for their accreditation, are routes that I fear might spoil some of the best aspects of the training programmes I've sourced and delivered this year, where a free skill-share arrangement can be found to benefit everyone.

STARS & Developing Societies

Helping societies through the development process by giving them advice and encouragement has been another key focus of my year, but since Pangaea I have found more time to actively assist societies in building themselves, rather than merely responsively, (as in the two weeks before Pangaea). We now have 4 Gold Societies, Hiking Club, Gilbert & Sullivan, Harmony Gospel Choir, and ReachOut!, all of whom have demonstrated their exemplary development and achievements in very different ways, and all of whom we at the Activities Centre frequently point to as examples of best practice and inspirations to other society organisers. We also have over 40 Silver Societies, and these have all formed development strategies, had committee members attend a variety of different trainings, networked with other societies, acquired feedback from their members, and engaged in UMSU's central and democratic processes by attending General Meetings.

UMSU Evolving

Developing societies is great, but if we don't develop the Union and the Union's provisions for them then our societies might be left in the mud when it comes to the long term.

Communication: I have been working with Groupspaces to try to formulate a coherent and sensible system of online communication between society members, society organisers, and the Activities Centre. It's a harder thing than it sounds. We've got the bare bones already and Groupspaces have proven to be a valuable (and free) resource for societies. It's now a question of formalising the system and in so doing creating a comprehensive database which will benefit not only communication from Activities Officer to society organisers and vice-versa, but will also present a sensible and logical online presence and understanding for new students wanting to get involved, or wanting to know what is going on. A digital Societies Network of the form that I envision it would truly articulate and praise the incredible amount of cool stuff that goes on, and shout it to the rest of the student body too. Groupspaces UK are working hard on it and I've been talking to them based on societies feedback about exactly what UMSU needs from them in terms of software and online tools. Needless to say, I had the last laugh.

Representation: I've been looking into methods of making societies feel more at home with where they stand with regards to other societies, the union, and the union's decision making process. The current Societies Committee structure seems somewhat alien to many societies, and a more sensible and logical solution seems to be to break societies down into categories and have them all represented on a Societies Executive. This direction of change should hopefully give societies more input into UMSU governance, society-specific governance, and more ownership felt over UMSU, it's resources, and its decision-making processes.

Expansion: It is my goal to see our Student Activities department expanded for the long term. At present we take on much more than we have the capacity to, and as a result, we aren't always able to assist societies and events as thoroughly as we would like to. We need more storage space, more resources, more staff time, and more energy for long-term development, if we are to properly attend to the huge amount of interest that there is among Manchester students, to put on good stuff. I've been working on

this as part of a wider strategy with the Executive, not only honing what we already do in Activities but comparing best practice of other Students Unions and finding useful services that we hadn't previously offered, acquiring more equipment, and trying to set up a more permanent and reliable service for students with ideas to utilise.

Pangaea

Accepting proposals and recruiting the new team. Exciting stuff. We're making special efforts this time to:

- 1) Learn from the positives and negatives of the last one.
- 2) Figure out where gaps can be filled.
- 3) Get student halls properly involved.
- 4) Make sure that new volunteers are recruited and mentored at every opportunity and have the skills to continue and improve into next academic year.

UMSU Elections

Many of you have asked me why I have decided not to re-stand for my position as Student Activities Officer. The answer is not that I don't have long term plans for the union or that I no longer care about student activities... (as you can hopefully see by some of the above development work I've been focussing on, I am actually incredibly interested in the long term future of UMSU activities). The reason I have made the tough personal decision not to re-run for the role is primarily because I believe that through running an election campaign over the next few weeks I may sacrifice some of the mental energy which I would prefer to put into my job, ensuring student activities. I appreciate that some people are very capable of running election campaigns and doing full time jobs simultaneously, (I've seen it done perfectly well in the past,) but I am well aware that the way my motivation works is not compatible with this sort of endeavour, and I would not feel comfortable running my job at a less-than-ideal level of energy for a month, which I know I would inevitably do were I to set myself an election campaign to run. (Also, I will most likely enjoy this elections period as a spectator much more than last year when I had the pressure of being a candidate on me. Some really interesting candidates and looking like a really interesting future for UMSU! Needless to say... I'll have the last laugh.)