

**Bangor University Response**  
**to the 2013-14 Student Union Annual Statement**

**Introduction:**

The overall tone of the Student Union Annual Statement is again positive – consistent with our strong partnership with the SU. We were especially pleased to see positive feedback about our investment and enhancement of teaching and support, and welcome the positive Commendations for topics such the joint honours charter; the presence of a strong Welsh community; our policy of keeping Wednesday afternoons free from academic study; ensuring that the four week deadline for returning work is met; recommendations as regards plagiarism; and the migration of mitigating circumstances details. These are excellent examples of our joint working, and we are grateful to the Students' Union for their recognition of these.

We also note that, since last year, Bangor has seen a dramatic increase in its NSS performance – moving us to 1<sup>st</sup> in Wales, and from 68<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> place in the UK (out of 153 institutions). Indeed, we are now in 7<sup>th</sup> place amongst the non-specialist HE institutions that are our peers (we lie level with Glasgow, Durham, and indeed both Oxford and Cambridge). These changes have been, in large part, through our joint working with the Student Union, and we are delighted to see that this work has borne fruit in such a dramatic way.

On the more specific issues that are raised in the document, our Response addresses each of the Recommendations in turn.

**1. Parity of experience**

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to do some usability testing on students in order to identify the areas where the specific handbook problems are occurring.*

Getting the Handbook right for students is a priority for us, and we would be happy to work to solve these issues. If details can be provided to the Academic Registry, these can be addressed on an *ad hoc* basis, when they are identified.

- *The University to investigate the option of school specific handbooks.*

**We are happy to work with the Student Union to investigate School-specific Handbooks. Subject to solving the technical issues, they would be a welcome addition.**

- *The University to provide staff training on how to access and support students in using the online handbook.*

**We were not aware of problems in staff using the documents. Again, if you can provide details of what the issues are, we would be happy to address them (again via the Academic Registry).**

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to provide information to students about unfair practice and plagiarism during exam weeks.*

**The unfair practice issues are, of course, a substantial concern for the University. We believed that our attempts to address this had been fairly successful, especially in known Schools and student groups where there had been an especially high incidence of unfair practice. Indeed, the number of Unfair Practice events (and hearings) has been in decline this past year. Nevertheless, we would be happy to work with the Student Union to try and further reduce this rate.**

- *The University to support the SU in seeking further feedback from students in regards to the specific issues that students face in regards to plagiarism.*

**We would be happy to provide support when requested.**

- *The University to issue an annual reminder to all staff, that Wednesday afternoons are to be kept free from academic study and compulsory lectures cannot be timetabled during this period.*

**There is already widespread awareness of the Wednesday afternoon rule amongst staff, including regulatory checks on the process in Timetabling. This means that most of the small number of exceptions are for unusual circumstances, though we are occasionally made aware of unapproved violations. We are happy to consider an annual reminder.**

- *The University to work with schools and Students' Union to investigate the timetabled sessions currently on Wednesday afternoon, to see if alternative arrangements can be made for those schools who do not have the capacity to fulfil their curriculum without teaching in this period.*

**This is not an easy issue to address in the present circumstances, given problems of space. However, we would be happy to work to identify any possible gaps. Moreover, we suspect that things will be easier to address once the additional Pontio spaces are available from 2015.**

- *The University to ensure that all joint honours students have a personal tutor in both schools, as per the charter, for the start of the academic year.*

**These are already in place in many Schools. We would be happy to work to identify any Schools who have not complied.**

- *Colleges to work with the SU to roll out joint honours events in order to highlight issues that students in their schools face and identify solutions and improvements for moving forward.*

**Again, these are already in place in some Schools, especially in Arts and Humanities – which has the largest number of joint Honours students. We would, of course, be happy to work to address any places where the situation could be improved.**

- *Schools and the Peer Guide Co-ordinator to work with the Students' Union to investigate the feasibility of joint honour students receiving a joint honours peer guide to support them during the initial weeks of term.*

**Again, some Schools do seem to have attempted to address this issue. As ever, we would be happy to build a sustainable model where possible.**

## **2. Inclusive curriculum**

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to implement recommendations in Bangor Students' Union's LGBT in HE report and NUS' On the Straight and Narrow report.*

**An initial meeting between the SU and the University (Director of Student Experience, Student Engagement Officer and Head of Disability Services) has already taken place to discuss inclusive curriculum work, and the group scoped a number of actions to implement the recommendations specific to LGBT students. We are happy to continue to meet to take the work forward through this group feeding into relevant committees as necessary.**

- *The University to produce a strategy for dealing with any reforms to DSA to ensure that the impact on Bangor University students is minimal, once clarity has been disclosed as a result of UK Government changes.*

**The University has already begun work on this. The Executive have approved a proposal to review services for disabled students across the University, to ensure a model of provision is implemented ahead of 2015/16 that is sustainable within the new funding arrangements. The SU will be consulted as this work moves forward, pending further clarity from the UK Government.**

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to create course guidelines relevant to disabled, LGBTQ+ and international students, which reflects on gender in the curriculum. This can be taken forward through the work of the Student Union and University inclusive curriculum group (as detailed above).*
- *The University to de-genderise its rules, regulations and procedures in order to remove any hetro-normative language.*

**Following the recommendation from the Student Union, the Academic Registry have now run a survey of the Rules and Regulations. We have identified a small number of instances (fewer than 10 in total), which will be reviewed at the next meeting of the Senate Regulations committee. We expect that there will be agreement for modification.**

### **3. Assessment and feedback**

- *The University to work with the SU to publicise the importance of students collecting their feedback.*

**We would be happy to work on this issue, which is important for a number of reasons. Indeed, we are currently advertising a CELT post dedicated to assessment and**

**feedback. In addition, the move towards electronic marking may go some distance to providing clear data on the topic, which offers opportunities to address the feedback issue in the service of better learning (for example by prompting students electronically).**

- *Schools to consistently utilise services such as blackboard, myBangor, email etc to publicise when assessment have been marked and are available to collect.*

**For most Schools this is not an issue. However, we would be happy to work jointly on the topic, including solutions that employ myBangor.**

- *The University to work with schools to ensure that they are providing 'office hours' or similar for students to arrange face to face contact time with staff to obtain and/or discuss their feedback.*

**Again, this is not an issue in most Schools, but there are problems in some places. We are happy to work with Directors of Teaching and Learning to address the issue. It would also be helpful if students made direct reference to the issue in Staff-Student Liaison committees, or in Module Evaluation forms, which make the issue easier for Directors of Teaching and Learning to address.**

#### **4. Welsh medium provision**

- *Schools to works closely with Canolfan Bedwyr to improve the availability and clarity of information on Welsh medium modules at Bangor University.*

**This issue is already being approached from several angles. The PVC (Welsh Medium) has been meeting with Schools in order to review Welsh Medium offerings, set planning targets, and consider ways of improving where there is a place for improvement, and these initial meetings are being followed up in detail by Canolfan Bedwyr staff. A working group including IT specialists has been considering ways of improving the information about Welsh medium modules on the University's website. We are very happy to work with students and the SU if there are any specific aspects of Welsh Medium offerings which students feel need more clarification and promotion.**

- *The University to investigate the feasibility of providing Welsh medium seminars to accompany modules only taught through the medium of English, if there is demand.*

**Welsh medium seminars and lab sessions have been or are about to be introduced into a number of courses which did not previously have them available. This is part of the School-level review and planning process noted above. If the SU is aware of any specific demands not being met, please inform the PVC (Welsh Medium) and those courses will be included in the planning considerations.**

- *The University to continue to investigate the impact the Coleg Cymraeg has had on the availability of Welsh medium modules.*

**This is continuing, both in the context of BU and in the context of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. Data of the impact of the CCC on Welsh medium offerings at BU can be provided upon request.**

- *The University to work with the SU to evaluate the process for students submitting their work to be translated and review the promotion of this service to Welsh speaking students.*

**The University is very happy to do this. A recent task group has been reviewing the Translation Unit's workload and operational guidelines; such a discussion with the SU would thus be well timed if conducted during the new academic year.**

## **5. Employability**

- *The University to work with the Students' Union and course representatives to review the BEA scheme to ensure that it is relevant, accessible and user-led, as a result of student feedback and in light of the developments with the HEAR.*

**As noted in the Annual Statement, the BEA team have been working with the SU and course reps as part of their ongoing work to incorporate student feedback into the continual development of the BEA scheme. The implementation of the HEAR is an opportunity to widen the appeal of the BEA scheme, and the University would welcome the SU's continued collaboration in ensuring that the BEA and the HEAR are developed in tandem - to provide students with integrated, accessible and user-led support for their employability.**

- *The University to ensure that all employability staff contact details are displayed on myBangor to ensure all students know who they can contact in their school for relevant BEA information.*

**Ensuring that schools are better able to support their students' engagement with the BEA is a priority for 2014/15. Staff contact details will be addressed as part of the enhancements described below.**

- *The BEA team to work with schools to ensure that a consistent message in regards to the purpose of the scheme, including subject specific information, is communicated clearly to students by their respective schools.*

**The University will be enhancing myBangor to provide tutors with a single screen overview of levels of BEA engagement amongst their tutees. In turn, Employability Contacts and Senior Tutors will be able to see overviews of levels of engagement by tutorial group, so that schools can monitor the effectiveness of their communication to students and better support students in utilising the BEA scheme. The BEA team will also have these overviews of levels of engagement by schools so that they can target support for schools as needed.**

- *The University to incorporate graduate attributes into module descriptors to provide students with a better understanding of the relevance of employability and the BEA as part of their degree.*

**The issue of module descriptors is complex, but we are happy to investigate the issue in consultation with the Student Union.**

- *The University to work with the SU to ensure promotion and understanding of the relevance of HEAR.*

**The SU's collaboration in promoting and ensuring understanding of the HEAR is enormously helpful, and we are happy to continue the SU's contribution to planning and implementation.**

## **6. The postgraduate experience**

- *The University, Students' Union, and UCU to work collaboratively to develop postgraduate representation and improve awareness of SU representation, and Staff Union representation amongst postgraduate students.*

**Advances have been made in improving awareness of SU representation during the year, with SU representation in all the College induction events held during Welcome week, as well introducing the Postgraduate Student Society. In CNS, representation of PGR students on School Research Committees was instigated where it was not already in place. They are also invited to Academic Board meetings and the Graduate School Steering Group meetings. In CAH, postgraduate students also sit as members of individual School Student-Staff liaison committees (in which they function as course-reps) and these committees meet at least once per semester. Postgraduates are also represented at College level where each School has at least one (and often two) PG reps (usually a PGT and PGR), who sit on the CAH Postgraduate Student Forum to which they contribute agenda items for discussion. This forum meets twice per semester and is chaired by the Graduate School. Last year course reps were elected from every PGT programme in the University, and this will happen routinely from now on. BUCU regularly meet with the SU President and with the PGSF to discuss University wide issues and to ensure that PGRs are represented.**

- *The Students' Union and University to work with the Postgraduate Students' Society to develop training for those who teach, that meets both student's and the institution's needs.*

**A draft code of practice for postgraduates who teach was prepared during the year by a working group and went out to Directors of T&L, College Deans, SU, BUCU and HR for two rounds of consultation. It covers training, and also establishes guidelines for good practice. Some examples of good practice already exist in the colleges. For example, a "Teaching for demonstrators" course is run in COPAS, and as part of its Diary of Training Events, CAH hosts a two-hour session on small group teaching, assessment and feedback. In addition, CAH postgrads are encouraged to take the PGCHE, as appropriate, and will also receive individual mentoring from the staff member with whom they will be teaching. Similar training opportunities will be available in future in CNS.**

- *The University to work with the SU and UCU to gather postgraduate student feedback on teaching and employment to better understand the landscape at Bangor.*

**Teaching quality (for PGR presumably on ERDP and specialist training courses within Colleges) is captured by PRES, PTES and employment data are already collected. However, for the latter there is lack of consistency across the University about where the data resides, and one of the aims of the Doctoral School will be to bring that data (for PGR) under the Doctoral School umbrella. The SU President sits on all of the PRES committees and they have full sight of both the process and the outcomes. BUCU and the SU meet regularly to discuss such issues. The PGSF also run surveys and feed this in to the process.**

#### **Conclusion:**

**The University again welcomes the 2013-14 Student Union Annual Statement. The document offers a considered and rounded acknowledgement of joint activities with the University, and the list of Commendation and Recommendations seems both measured and practical. As our Response makes clear, there has been engagement a wide range of topics in the last year, which we are delighted to see that this appears to have produced excellent results in the NSS. We anticipate working with the Student Union in continuing these improvements, to build a better University for students in future years.**