



POSTGRADUATE ANNUAL STATEMENT

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BANGOR
STUDENTS' UNION

POSTGRADUATE ANNUAL STATEMENT 2014-15

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CHAPTER 1

VISION FOR POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION AT BANGOR UNIVERSITY

Postgraduates are an incredibly diverse body of students; the lifeblood of an institution's research and they develop innovative and creative teaching methods that contribute to Bangor University's reputation for excellent teaching, learning and research.

With the growth in the number of Postgraduate students over recent years and with a growing consensus that more should be done to open up access to postgraduate study, Students' Unions and the sector must look again at the structure, purpose and place of postgraduate education within Higher Education.

Bangor University Students' Union is committed to ensuring that postgraduate students' experiences are as rewarding as those of undergraduate students, and that postgraduate students are supported to succeed in an ever changing environment.

Our vision for postgraduate education at Bangor University is an education where postgraduates' contributions are valued and trusted, and where education is rooted in the needs of students. Our vision is one where students are provided with opportunities for personal and professional development, and where postgraduates are trusted partners in the development of their individual and collective experiences, and in the development of teaching and learning at the University.

We will achieve this vision through ensuring that postgraduates are partners in their education, able to lead, challenge and shape the direction of their own individual and collective academic experiences.

Our vision for postgraduate education is an education where postgraduates' contributions are valued and trusted, and where education is rooted in the needs of students.

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INTRODUCTION TO OUR STATEMENT

Over the last few years, Bangor University and Bangor Students' Union have worked together to embed the ethos and practice of 'students as true partners' in their education. The relationship between the Union and University has grown significantly in strength and we have been working with more departments and staff on issues affecting students. It is abundantly clear that the University appreciates the work of the Students' Union in improving the experiences of students at Bangor, and there is a mutual respect between University senior staff and Students' Union Officers.

For Undergraduate students, overall satisfaction is at an all-time high in Bangor, and this is no doubt due to the partnership work between the Union and University. Clear developments in the University's provision are being seen by students and this is evident in the increase of the University's student satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey (NSS), and we know there is a strong commitment across the organisation to continue to improve in these areas.

We believe that the next step for the University's partnership and enhancement agenda needs to emphasise the need to transform postgraduate students' experiences at Bangor, leading the sector in providing a holistic education for postgraduate taught and research students, ensuring that postgraduates as individuals and as a collective contribute to the overall direction of postgraduate education, and Bangor's quality teaching and learning.

There are an increasing number of projects that the Union and University are working together on, particularly at a senior level, and more work is being done for this work to continue across all departments and in every school. Although in some areas there is still a way to go, it is clear to the Union and students alike, that there is a commitment from the institution to continue in this direction; embedding true partnership work, in order to create an approach that goes beyond consultation and basic representation, allowing students to be the driving force behind the partnership agenda.

In order to ensure that students are the driving force behind new developments, some work does need to be done at a local level in order to challenge some cultures that exist in schools around what working in partnership actually means. However, there is also a role for the Students' Union to play, in terms of engaging students at a school level about the ethos of this work and how course reps and students can move even further forward with this agenda.



Partnership is about more than just listening to the student voice and enabling students to have input in decisions that affect them. True partnership relies upon an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are all set by students and staff in partnership.

Welsh Government Policy Statement on Higher Education, June 2013



Through our highly valued emphasis on the Student Voice and by working in partnership with the Students' Union in the operation and delivery of the University's activities, we will continue our emphasis on student satisfaction and on engaging students as partners.



Bangor University Strategic Plan, 2015-2020

In line with the University's Student Experience Strategy 2015-2018 Bangor Students' Union is keen to develop partnership working to focus on the impact that decisions, policies and procedures have on individual students. We must ensure that partnership is inclusive and diverse and provides an environment where all students can take part in our work, no matter their background or how they define.

It's also important that we recognise the diversity of students' experiences. There is no one student experience. Students engage with Higher Education and the opportunities that it provides in a number of ways. We cannot openly and meaningfully discuss what an inclusive education looks like when we talk about students as a homogenous group who all share the same experience.

It's also important that we recognise the diversity of students' experiences

Ensuring that partnership working is realised across the University, where staff and students discuss issues in an environment where staff and students are respected and valued

Through ensuring that partnership working is realised across the University, where staff and students discuss issues in an environment where staff and students are respected and valued, Bangor University can ensure that students' experiences of Higher Education are transformational and exciting.

This report provides a snapshot of students' experiences in 2014/15 and also reflects on some of the more significant areas for development at Bangor University. To voice student's experience, this report takes into account the response of the students from the Our Manifesto 2014/15 survey co-ordinated by the Student's Union and focus group activities with postgraduate students. Our main areas of investigation are; teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, the course representative system, learning resources, welsh medium provision and an inclusive curriculum.

Student Satisfaction at Bangor

Our first ever Postgraduate Annual Statement and our Postgraduate Vision for Education are rooted in the research undertaken by the Students' Union. This research was conducted through the 'Our Manifesto 2014/15' survey, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys, Course Representatives' feedback, and consultation and engagement work undertaken by the Postgraduate Student Society in 2014/15.

The Students' Union's 'Our Manifesto 14/15' surveyed more than 10% of the overall postgraduate population at Bangor University, and our findings from our surveying was reinforced by our first Postgraduate Consultation event in several years where we spoke to 30 postgraduates on a range of issues.

What the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) tells us

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) report provides a wealth of information about the academic experience of postgraduate taught students, and received responses from 618 students. This was an overall response rate of 30%, an increase from 25% in the 2013 PTES report. The PTES survey measures the overall satisfaction of postgraduate taught students, and in 2014 Bangor University scored 84% for overall satisfaction for the quality of their courses, slightly above the sector average of 83%. In comparison to 2013 this is a considerable increase from 71% with a sector average of 69%. A similar metric as part of the National Student Survey for undergraduates in 2014 gave Bangor an overall satisfaction score of 91%.

Students' responses described the taught element of their course as **'Passionate'**, **'Amazing'** and **'Inspiring'**.

Whilst the 2014 PTES responses demonstrate ongoing improvements for postgraduate taught students, responses also highlight areas for development, which mirror our findings. Themes such as the quality and timing of feedback and deadline clumping were raised, issues which were also raised during the 2013 PTES and our Annual Student Statement 2013/14. Students also reported concerns with course material, timetabling and module choices, and we feel that further investigation into these issues would be beneficial.

2014 OVERALL SATISFACTION
OF
POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS

84% **SECTOR AVERAGE**
83%

What the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) tells us

PRES is a national survey that 122 institutions took part in 2013 enabling postgraduates who undertake research degrees to express their opinion about their academic experience in their institutions.

The overall response rate from Bangor University for PRES 2013 had increased to 49% (279 respondents) since 2011 (44%) which was considerably higher than the response of 41% for all the institutions taking part in the study. It has been reported that the PRES response for 2014/15 is 49% with a sector average of 51%.

The University's scores in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) tell us that research students' overall satisfaction with degree programmes at Bangor is higher than average by 3% at 85%. This is also a considerable increase on the University's score in 2011 of 74%. The scores for five schools were at 100% for overall satisfaction.

PRES highlights a number of excellent features at Bangor University, such as supervisor skills and knowledge, regular contact with staff, useful feedback and identifying student's development needs, which four schools were scored at 100%.

Bangor University was commended for opportunities for students to teach, the support and guidance provided for teaching, developing the student's project management skills, and improving effective communication skills. Evidence of improvement of supervision was highlighted as BU's greatest achievement in the last two years.

The aspects that we would like to highlight and further investigate following feedback are "progress and assessment", "opportunities" and "training for teaching" at the University. Additionally areas such as induction, monitoring progress, understanding the standards for these submission and the procedures for final assessments are areas that we also identified as scoring below the sector average. These also included student's personal development, attending/presenting at conferences and publication of their work, and we would like to further investigate these findings.

OVERALL SATISFACTION
WITH DEGREE PROGRAMMES
HIGHER THAN AVERAGE BY 3% AT **85%**

THE SCORES FOR FIVE SCHOOLS
WERE AT **100%**
FOR OVERALL SATISFACTION

METHODOLOGY

This report provides a snapshot of students' experiences in 2014/15 and also reflects on a range of themes at Bangor University. We have mapped out our vision for Postgraduate education and discuss in detail the 'cornerstones' for enhancing postgraduate education and realising students' vision for their education.

To voice student's experience, this report takes into account the response of the students from the Our Manifesto 2014/15 survey co-ordinated by the Student's Union and focus group activities with postgraduate students. Our aim was to better understand and to map the academic experiences of postgraduate students at the University.

To enable us to do this we decided on a fixed research method using a survey to allow us to quantify our results. In a hope to create action research to examine the information, we provide recommendations to the University and reflect on the outcomes each year.

Overall 260 students took part in the Our Manifesto 14-15 survey. 93% postgraduate students completed the survey in English and 17 (7%) postgraduate students completed the survey in Welsh. This was a representative sample of approximately 2,615 full time and part time postgraduate students at Bangor University.

Of the students participating in the research the majority (60%) were females and 38% were males. 62% were from the UK, 18% from the European Union and 20% were Internationals from outside the European Union.

More postgraduates studying taught courses (e.g. MA, MSc) participated which was 57% (148) of the overall amount, compared to 30% (77) of the respondents being PHD Students, 10% (26) were Postgraduate Research students (e.g. MRes, MPhil) and 3% (7) were studying PGCE.

For us to recruit participants we used Survey Monkey which is an online survey platform that enabled the survey to be online for students to access it at any time. The survey was available in the Academic Representation Unit section on the Student's Union website at the start of Semester 1 until March 2015. The survey was mentioned at meetings such as Course Rep Council, Course Rep Conference and events (e.g. Joint Honours) to encourage students to take part. The link was also sent in every e-mail to all-student and was shared through social media and prompt messages about the themes were sent regularly. The students had a chance of winning a Kindle when participating in the survey. This was a representative sample of the student's academic experience at BU. The result were reviewed through Survey Monkey and analysed for reporting purposes.

The participant's information is anonymised and only used as evidence for our academic representation work. The respondents gave opting-in consent to participate in the research.

The survey was presented online through Survey Monkey which provided a design, distribution and analysis service for the survey. The 52 questions were a combination of factual and opinion questions and a mixture of open and closed questions. Taught and research students were directed to the appropriate questions throughout the survey. A mixture of two way, multiple-choice questions were used along with levels of satisfaction (e.g. strongly disagree to strongly agree).

To find out further information focus groups were also used where Sabbatical Officers facilitated discussions on their area of expertise with postgraduates. 30 participants were divided into groups and discussed specific topics about their experience as students at the University. Information from the discussions were recorded and used as evidence for this report.

The evidence gathered have merged into the themes of the report providing discussions and recommendations for each theme.

CHAPTER 2: WELCOME TO BANGOR

ARRIVING AT BANGOR

Induction is an integral part of student life. For both returning students and students new to Bangor University, ensuring that students are offered a robust and useful induction period, beyond welcome activities, is incredibly important for retention and attainment.

We were eager to understand students' experiences of applying to Bangor University and the information provided to successful candidates. Casework and queries suggest that Postgraduate students are often less likely to receive the required information before starting their course. We asked respondents to respond to the following statement 'I received sufficient information before starting my current PG study'.

We are pleased to see the University committing to improving the applications process for students through the Direct Online Admissions Project and believe that this will improve the application and welcome process for students. Our research found that 40% of respondents did not receive sufficient information before starting their studies. This included information on hidden course costs where only just over half (54%) of respondents agreed that they were made fully aware of additional course costs. This is reflected in the PRES 2013 report as the University only scored 66% for students having an appropriate induction before the commencement of their research degrees, compared to sector average of 74%. We would like to see this issue addressed by the University, particularly for international students coming to study at Bangor University, and in the UK, for the first time.

60%
OF RESPONDENTS
**RECEIVED
SUFFICIENT
INFORMATION
BEFORE STARTING
THEIR STUDIES**

Part C of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Quality Code outlines the Expectations placed on institutions for the publication of information about Higher Education provision. The Expectation as outlined in the Code says; **'Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy'**.

Commendation:

- We are pleased to see the introduction of an induction and welcome programme for both PGT and PGR students, and would encourage the University to continue to develop these programmes in partnership and consultation with students and the Students' Union.

54%

OF RESPONDENTS
**FULLY AWARE
OF ADDITIONAL
COURSE COSTS**

In light of this we asked students to respond to the following statement, 'The information I received was an accurate representation of life at Bangor and in my school'. Half agreed that the information that they had received before beginning their course was an accurate representation of life at Bangor and in their school. A quarter of students did not agree with the statement.

We are pleased to see the ongoing development of the postgraduate induction and welcome fair as an opportunity for new and returning students to access information about the opportunities available to them, and we encourage the University to continue to enhance this opportunity in line with student feedback.

Recommendations:

- The University to review its welcome and induction programme for all new and returning students, including for students beginning in January.
- The University to ensure that postgraduates receive adequate information and guidance before starting their studies, including a point of contact for queries before welcome events.

A SUPPORTIVE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

To help you make the most of your time at university, we will endeavour to:

Ensure that your environment is inclusive, welcoming and supportive by:

- Providing appropriate academic and pastoral support.
- Ensuring ready access to general information about the university and its organisation
- Ensuring easy access to counselling, disability and financial advisory services
- Fostering cultural wealth and community involvement
- Fostering a safe environment, free from negative discrimination or harassment, based on mutual respect

Bangor University Student Charter

We asked students to respond to the following statements 'I know who my personal tutor is' and 'I have found my personal tutor useful'. The majority of respondents responded positively to these statements, with 83% and 52% of respondents agreeing and strongly agreeing with the respective statements. However a quarter of respondents disagreed with the statement, 'I have found my personal tutor useful', which we find concerning.

Eager to understand more about how postgraduates engage with their Personal Tutors and the issues that they discuss, we asked students to select the issues that they discussed most with their Tutor.

Feedback tells us that the four topics most discussed are **Personal/Mitigating/extenuating Circumstances** (65%), **Assessment/Feedback** (58%), **Module marks** (56%) and **Personal development** (54%).

A significant percentage of the students also discussed **Module Evaluation** (45%), **Academic Representation** (34%), **Mental Health/Wellbeing** (30%), **Academic Appeals** (29%) and a small portion (13%) discussed the **Bangor Employability Award** (BEA) with their Tutor.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some PGR students are not allocated a Personal Tutor or do not meet regularly with their Tutors. In our first Annual Student Statement we said that the University is an institution that "cares about its relationship with students", which includes the University's commitment to pastoral care through the University's Personal Tutor system. We were pleased to see the University introduce Personal Tutors for all postgraduate students in 2012/13, and encourage the University to ensure that Personal Tutor support for postgraduates is thoroughly monitored and reviewed, to ensure parity of experience.

To find out more about how often students engage with their Tutor we asked students to respond to the following statement, 'I meet my Personal Tutor at least once a term'. More than half of respondents (57%) reported that they meet their personal tutor at least once a term, however 28% reported that they do not meet their tutor regularly. Feedback from students suggests that some students have had no contact at all with their Personal Tutor at the time of completing our survey, or were allocated a Tutor several months into their course programme.

RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY...

57%

MEET THEIR PERSONAL TUTOR AT LEAST ONCE A TERM

28%

DO NOT MEET THEIR TUTOR REGULARLY

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University for its commitment to Pastoral Support for all students, and would like to repeat our sentiment that Bangor is an institution that cares about its relationship with students.

Recommendations:

- The University to ensure that all postgraduate students are allocated a Personal Tutor at the beginning of the academic term.
- The University to ensure that Personal Tutors and students are engaging where necessary to ensure that students' engagement is monitored and that students are supported.

CHAPTER 3: PARTNERS IN OUR EDUCATION

Partnership is about more than just listening to the student voice and enabling students to have input in decisions that affect them. True partnership relies upon an environment where the priorities, content and direction of the learning experience are all set by students and staff in partnership.

**Welsh Government Policy Statement on Higher Education,
June 2013**

Students as partners is a well-embedded theme in undergraduate study at Bangor and across the sector, and we believe that the next challenge for Bangor and the wider sector is to champion postgraduates as partners. We believe that student engagement impacts positively on a range of metrics, including student retention, attainment, and the development of a postgraduate community both within Schools and across the institution. We believe that partnership and postgraduate engagement needs to become a strategic focus, as it has successfully been for undergraduate students, in order to achieve the strategic aims the institution has set out in its 2015-2020 Strategic Plan.

Student representation is also integral to quality enhancement and assurance in higher education institutions. The principle of student engagement and representation is recognised by a number of sector organisations. In **Chapter B5 of the Quality Code** the QAA say that Universities should provide an inclusive environment for student engagement and representation, and that this environment should anticipate the varied needs of learners and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to academic opportunities.

Whilst partnership work is far more powerful than requesting feedback or consulting students, we believe that the University must first take some smaller steps in recognising the importance of the student voice at postgraduate study, and we are eager to see students lead the development of this work in partnership with the University and Students' Union.

We asked students to respond to the following statement 'My school has regularly asked me for my opinions on how my course is run'. Only half of respondents reported that they are regularly asked for feedback and the score was slightly higher at 67% for PRES respondents in 2013 and 78% for PTES respondents in 2014. As a result of this we would like to continue the dialogue around feedback mechanisms across the University to ensure that all students are able to provide feedback on their experiences.

Higher education providers put in place mechanisms to collect, review and respond as appropriate to evaluations from those concerned with research degrees, including individual research students and groups of research students or their representatives.

Evaluations are considered openly and constructively and the results are communicated appropriately.

Chapter B11 of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Quality Code

MY SCHOOL HAS REGULARLY ASKED ME FOR MY OPINIONS ON HOW MY COURSE IS RUN

ONLY HALF OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY ARE REGULARLY ASKED FOR FEEDBACK

Module evaluation provides students with the opportunity to comment on the quality of their academic experiences. The system for undergraduate students continues to develop and provides staff and students with the means to enhance provision and generate evidence to be used for the development of teaching and learning across the institution. The rollout of module evaluation has successfully supported students and the University in identifying problems and generating local solutions. For these reasons we echo our calls for a module evaluation system for both PGT and PGR students.

Throughout this Statement we have identified recurring themes among postgraduate students, and believe that a module or course evaluation system, beyond PTES and PRES, would provide the University with the evidence additional and local evidence required to generate discussions between staff and students about the most effective way of enhancing students' overall experiences. An evaluation system would reinforce the University's understanding of its PTES and PRES scores.

40%
OF STUDENTS
REPORTING

**DEADLINE
CLUMPING**

**ONLY HALF
REPORTING THAT**

**FEEDBACK ON
THEIR WORK HELPS
THEM CLARIFY HOW
OR WHERE THEY
NEED TO IMPROVE.**

We are extremely pleased and congratulate the University for its successful application to the Higher Education Academy for the development of a mechanism for PGR students to provide feedback on their research and learning environment at Bangor University, and look forward to engaging with the University on the development of this project.

Taught students face a number of similar issues to Undergraduate students through accessing resources, problems with course organisation and management, and dissertation supervision, however there are a number of issues that taught students regularly report to the Students' Union as barriers to succeeding and fully enjoying their experience at Bangor. These include 40% reporting deadline clumping, and only half reporting that feedback on their work helps them clarify how or where they need to improve. This suggests that a similar system to the current Undergraduate module evaluation system would be sufficient to capture quality academic experiences and identify areas for improvement.

The experiences and needs of MRes and PhD students are significantly different to those of PGT students and Undergraduate students, including the duration and mode of study, frequency of contact, and diversity of research areas. The issues reported to the Students' Union through 'Our Manifesto' 2014-15 were themes such as 70% of students reporting the need for improved research skills training, and only a third reporting that they are satisfied with the study spaces available to PGR students. The University did however score highly in the PRES 2013 study in developing student's research skills with 89%, the same as the sector average, and 78% for professional development, compared to a sector average of 76%

70%
OF STUDENTS
REPORTING

**THE NEED FOR
IMPROVED
RESEARCH SKILLS
TRAINING**

**ONLY A THIRD
REPORTING THAT**

We would recommend a school-level evaluation system for postgraduate research students that collates evidence on issues such as resources, equipment, supervision, and availability of staff. This will ensure that the principle of anonymous feedback is maintained for PGR students and that any new system for research students' evaluation remains relevant to their studies.

**THEY ARE SATISFIED
WITH THE STUDY
SPACES AVAILABLE
TO PGR STUDENTS**

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University for being proactive in working with the HEA to develop mechanisms to allow PGR students to provide feedback on their research and learning environments, in order to enhance students' experiences of research study at Bangor University.

Recommendations:

- The University to identify staff responsible for the Postgraduate Annual Statement and work with the Union to implement the recommendations.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to develop an evaluation system relevant to PGT and PGR students across the University, that enhances the University's ability to provide quality academic experiences for PG students.
- The University's Student Engagement Project Officer to work with the Students' Union to develop a means to host Staff-Student Conferences for PTES and PRES.
- The University to commit to improving the response rates to PTES and PRES, including investing in their promotion.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to implement its Student Fellows project.

OUR REPRESENTATION

Course Representative Systems must allow opportunities for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels within the University. This must be underpinned by the belief that students are best represented by their peers. This ensures that all students are partners in their education, and will allow a more active involvement in, and ownership of, their learning and research environments.

The Course Representative system has developed considerably in recent years and the University's support for embedding the system in all schools has resulted in a number of positive initiatives that have enhanced students' experiences, including Student Submissions to Internal Quality Audits.

Whilst the roles of Undergraduate Course Representatives have developed at Bangor since 2011, postgraduate representation has not developed in the same way. The Students' Union is keen to see the role of Postgraduate Course Reps develop so that they play an equal part in developing teaching and learning and their academic and research environment at Bangor, and we recognise the role that we must play in leading these developments.

In 2014 we consulted with Postgraduate students on the current model of representation and asked for students' ideas on the best way to engage postgraduate students in representation, ensuring that any structure represents the diversity of postgraduate study. Based on that feedback we are proposing the following changes to our Course Rep Structures for all modes of Postgraduate study.

The **Students' Union** is keen to see the role of **Postgraduate Course Reps** develop so that they play an **equal part** in **developing teaching and learning** and their academic and research environment

- **One PGT Course Rep** should be elected **per academic School**. These Course Reps should meet as part of Staff-Student Liaison Committee Meetings, held four times per year, twice in each academic semester.
- **One PGR (MRes) Course Rep** should be elected **per academic School**. These Course Reps should meet as part of School's Research Committees, where a dedicated section of this meeting is allocated to discuss student representation issues. These students should not meet as part of Undergraduate level study.
- **One PGR (PhD) Course Rep** should be elected by **subject/research area** within each academic School. These Course Reps should meet as part of School's Research Committees, where a dedicated section of this meeting is allocated to discuss student representation issues. These students should not meet as part of Undergraduate level study.

The role of the Postgraduate Students' Society within representation is also incredibly important. We would like to commend the University for including postgraduate representatives, in addition to Sabbatical Officers, on University Committees. We would recommend that the Postgraduate Society adopt the following model for its Committee;

- **There should be 5 College Representatives on the Committee for PGR students (MRes and PhD) to engage and represent PGR issues within the Society.**

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University for including postgraduate representatives, in addition to Sabbatical Officers, on University Committees, and thank the University for engaging positively with these students.

Recommendations:

- The Students' Union and University to develop a Code of Practice for the Postgraduate Course Representative System, in line with the structure as outlined above.
- The Students' Union to develop PG-specific training for students involved in representation activity.

CHAPTER 4: POSTGRADUATES' ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

WHY WE CHOSE BANGOR

Deciding on a course and institution can be one of the most challenging and important decisions a Graduate will make to further their academic and professional career. Students have very different reasons for choosing their institution and our research highlights these variations. Our data demonstrated that a high percentage (40%) of respondents were influenced by the overall reputation of the institution and the reputation of their academic school.

A large number of students reported remaining in Bangor due to relationships with School staff (44%), which echoes what we said in our 2011-12 Student Written Submission that Bangor is an institution that "cares about its relationships with students". Encouragingly 63% reported that the curriculum attracted them to study at Bangor, and more than half (52%) were encouraged by good employment prospects.

We would also like to note that a number of comments made by students were related to the University's fee structure, and we would recommend that the University's fee structures remain consistent and comparable as a means of ensuring that postgraduate study is accessible to all students.

Deliver an excellent learning experience and environment, which provides the best possible opportunity for our students to succeed.

Bangor University Strategic Plan, 2015-2020

In our 2013-14 Annual Student Statement we commended the University for its above sector average score for Teaching and Learning for taught programmes (80% satisfaction), and we are pleased that Bangor has increased that score to 85% compared to the sector average of 82% in the 2014 PTES and has made excellence in teaching and learning a key strategic aim for the University.

2013-14 ANNUAL STUDENT STATEMENT WE COMMENDED THE UNIVERSITY
 FOR ITS
ABOVE SECTOR AVERAGE SCORE
 FOR
TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR TAUGHT PROGRAMMES
80% SATISFACTION

Students' Union and PTES data demonstrate that students' experience of engaging with academic staff is positive however there are concerns from students regarding a small number of contact hours. One student commented that the number of hours that they receive did not coincide with the contact hours described in the information published by the University online and in prospectuses. We would like to see this issue addressed through reviewing communications and the provision of information, and encourage the University to engage further with postgraduates to better understand their expectations.

BANGOR HAS INCREASED THAT SCORE TO
& 85%

Commendation:

- We commend the University for providing a well-rounded postgraduate education at Bangor, and encourage the University to continue to provide opportunities for students to enhance their academic experiences.

Recommendations:

- The University to ensure the clarity and accuracy of information provided to students before registration, including course content, support, and opportunities to enhance their employability.
- The University to provide opportunities for postgraduate students to engage in validation and re-validation processes to support the enhancement of teaching, learning and the curriculum at Bangor.

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT



Assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum. It powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. It is one of the most significant influences on students' experience of higher education and all that they gain from it. The reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning.

Boud and Associates, 2010:1

We believe that feedback should measure students' learning, help students improve their learning, and support students to undertake learning and assessment independently. Assessments should be authentic and should be supported by feedback that allows students to judge for themselves how they are performing. We also believe that feedback should be a continuous process, and should include on-going written and verbal feedback from lecturers and peers which will allow students to self-assess their learning and understanding.



From this viewpoint the purpose of assessment is to foster the kinds of attitudes and dispositions, as well as the skills and knowledge that learners will need to tackle the kinds of tasks and challenges they are likely to face throughout their lives. This future-focused view of assessment is conveyed by the term 'sustainable assessment.'



Boud, 2000

Assessment and feedback is an area where the sector falls short of students' expectations and Bangor has succeeded in improving its score in the National Student Survey (NSS) for undergraduates, and we are eager to work with the University to take the same strides forward for postgraduates' satisfaction of assessment and feedback.

PRES 2013 scored 90% for regular contact with supervisors compared to the sector average of 86%. There was also a 7% improvement in the PTES response that was received last year, scoring 78% for usefulness of feedback. Whilst we are seeing improvements at postgraduate study, consecutive PTES results have demonstrated that students are not satisfied with the quality or timeliness of feedback, and research students have suggested that the level of written feedback that they receive is poor. Approximately a quarter of students reported that they do not receive a clear deadline for feedback on their work, with 40% reporting that workloads often became unmanageable due to the clumping of deadlines.

APPROX 1/4 OF STUDENTS REPORTED

THEY DO NOT RECEIVE A CLEAR DEADLINE FOR FEEDBACK ON THEIR WORK

40% OF STUDENTS REPORTED

WORKLOADS OFTEN BECAME UNMANAGEABLE DUE TO THE CLUMPING OF DEADLINES

I FEEL THAT THE FEEDBACK I HAVE RECEIVED HAS GIVEN ME THE INFORMATION I NEED TO IMPROVE FURTHER WORK

ONLY HALF OF STUDENTS REPORTED THAT THEY FEEL THAT THE FEEDBACK THEY RECEIVED ON THEIR WORK DEMONSTRATED HOW TO IMPROVE IN THE FUTURE.

52%

We asked all respondents to respond to the statement 'I feel that the feedback I have received has given me the information I need to improve further work'. Only half of students (52%) reported that they feel that the feedback they received on their work demonstrated how to improve in the future. Comments suggested that the feedback received by students was often unclear and did not provide meaningful or useful comments.

POSTGRADUATE ANNUAL STATEMENT 2014-15

We have also received concerns from a number of PhD students who receive very little written feedback on their work, especially from Supervisory Committees. In the PTES 2013 report the University scored 80%, lower than the sector average of 85% for students understanding of **'the requirements and deadlines for formal monitoring of my progress'**.

We are pleased to see the University's Doctoral School implement clear and more consistent approaches to Monitoring and Supervision across the University, and are confident that new procedures to be introduced in 2015/16 will provide staff and students with the necessary structure to track students' progression. We would like to emphasise the need to provide clear written feedback on students' work, especially at progression points, to ensure that students are able to self-reflect on their learning and performance to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

We would urge the Doctoral School to ensure that new Monitoring Procedures are clearly outlined to students and ensure that the commitments of Supervisors, Committee members and the students are made clear at the outset. We would also like to reinforce the importance of clear and appropriate records of the outcomes of meetings, activities, and feedback, as outlined in Chapter B11 of the Quality Code.

Additionally a number of respondents highlighted that modules where assessment is 100% examination, usually at the end of term, does not accurately reflect students' learning and academic ability, and also doesn't provide students with the opportunity to improve or reflect on their work. We would like to work with academic Schools to enhance assessment methods to ensure that assessments are authentic and designed to support students to demonstrate their understanding.

Commendations:

- We would like to commend the University for developing clear monitoring guidelines and procedures for staff across the University, to be piloted in 2015/16, and encourage the University to review these procedures in line with feedback from staff and students.
- We would like to commend the University for developing clear assessment and feedback guidelines and encourage the University to continue to review these guidelines in line with student feedback.

Recommendation:

- The University to ensure that the University's guidelines for returning feedback and setting return dates are applied at all levels of study, as outlined in the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students on Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes.
- The University to develop clear and consistent Supervisory and Monitoring Guidelines and seek feedback from students on their implementation.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to develop Supervisory Guidelines for PGT Dissertation supervision.

OUR LIBRARY SERVICE

Students regularly report that the provision of resources is not sufficient for their studies, however Bangor has demonstrated a year on year increase in both PTES and NSS. Additionally 'adequate provision of library facilities' scored 76% in the PTES 2013 report, only 2% below the sector average. We are pleased to see the development of the Student Library Champions scheme and urge the University to ensure that this project is led by the students involved in the project to ensure true partnership.

The University has invested considerably in library resources in recent years through the student : book ratio, the introduction of the online reading list system, and an investment in e-books and e-resources, all of which have contributed to improved responses from students about the service.

Commendation:

- We commend the University for its investment in the Library's resources and services in recent years and encourage the University to invest in the Library's services in line with student feedback.

'Our Manifesto 14-15' revealed that the majority (46%) of respondents were aware that they could request that the library purchase specific books or journals, with around a quarter (28%) of the students reporting having used the system. 30% of the students were not aware of the inter-library loan system, where any student can request a book from another University library from around the UK.

The majority of the students reported that they feel that the library services are easy to use, however some repeated comments did concern us. These included:

“...requests not being implemented,

...expensive service and therefore limited,

Our Manifesto 2014-15 Survey Respondents

Recommendations:

- The University to review, in partnership with students and the Students' Union, the information provided about the library's purchasing and inter-library loan system, and the ease of these processes for students.
- The University to ensure the implementation of the Talis Aspire reading system across all programmes of study to ensure accurate investment in resources.

A RELEVANT AND ATTRACTIVE CURRICULUM FOR THE FUTURE

Students report continuing or returning to postgraduate study in order to enhance their employability and to develop their skills. It is therefore incredibly important that the curriculum that Bangor University offers to students is relevant and grounded in students' needs.

Since the introduction of £9k fees for Undergraduate students Universities are comparing their 'academic offer' to other institutions, to develop an attractive education to prospective students. Whilst we are supportive of initiatives to ensure that the University's curriculum is relevant and attractive, the Students' Union would like to work with the University in this area to ensure that that this happens through working in partnership with students to review the University's teaching and learning activity.

Evidence suggests that the majority of respondents to Our Manifesto 14-15 (72%) are satisfied with the choice of modules on offer in their school. 82% agreed that taught modules are current and relevant to current research and students' expectations, with 62% agreeing that they receive adequate information to make informed decisions when deciding on modules. Additionally 63% reported that the curriculum attracted them to study at Bangor. Some comments however suggested that many feel that the information provided is outdated which leaves them unable to make fully informed module choices. We would recommend that the University ensures that module descriptors and the information provided to students is regularly reviewed.

Many students commented on the need for a flexible curriculum, and told us that they were disappointed by their programme for not being flexible, with a number reporting that they felt that they studied modules irrelevant to their degree programme, with some sharing courses with Undergraduate students.

A number of students reported that they felt that they studied modules irrelevant to their degree programme, with some sharing courses with Undergraduate students.

We also received a number of comments from students about course organisation and management. A number of comments across Our Manifesto 14-15 and PTES 2014 data highlight problems with module weighting across semesters, incorrect information on myBangor about modules, and modules being cancelled at the beginning of the academic term. We will continue to work with academic schools to raise these issues as they arise, but encourage the University to take a pro-active approach in ensuring accuracy of information provided to students.

Recommendations:

- The University to ensure that module information provided to students is clear and accurate and that students are notified in advance of modules that are unable to run in sufficient time.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to develop ways for students to contribute to the development of the curriculum in their school.

INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING AND SUPPORTIVE CURRICULUM

The Student Charter commits to providing students with an inclusive, welcoming, and supportive environment, and in the Students' Union's Annual Student Statement 2013-14 we said that the provision of this environment 'has positive implications for students'. We believe that through ensuring a welcoming and inclusive curriculum (and environment) student retention and attainment will naturally improve, enabling an environment that supports staff and students to facilitate conversations around enhancing postgraduates' experiences.

Through Student Union research we discovered that the majority of the students agree (84%) that they feel included in discussions and activities in lectures and seminars. Most (73%) of the students feel that the context of their work is reflective of their life experiences.

84% OF STUDENTS AGREE

**THAT THEY FEEL
INCLUDED IN
DISCUSSIONS
AND ACTIVITIES
IN LECTURES
AND SEMINARS**

73% OF STUDENTS FEEL THAT

**THE CONTEXT
OF THEIR WORK
IS REFLECTIVE
OF THEIR LIFE
EXPERIENCES**

We are pleased to note that a majority (77%) agreed that they feel comfortable raising issues, either publicly or privately with a staff member. A slightly lower number (65%) agreed that they feel comfortable raising these issues with a course representative and almost all students (94%) felt safe in their learning environment.

90% of research students feel they have regular contact with their supervisor, according to the PRES 2013 report. Postgraduates have regularly reporting wanting to take part in collaborative events and activities across Schools to enhance their sense of belonging to a community, and also develop opportunities for students to enhance their skills and experiences, and we would like to work with the University to develop a postgraduate community at Bangor.

In addition to this the provision of a strong academic community for postgraduate students is an incredibly important feature of postgraduate study, and we would like to see the Students' Union Postgraduate Student Society work in partnership with the University to develop strong communities for postgraduate engagement.

Commendation:

- We commend the University for its investment in the Library's resources and services in recent years and encourage the University to invest in the Library's services in line with student feedback.

Recommendations:

- The University to work with the Students' Union to raise awareness of the identity and role of Course Representatives to students.
- The University to encourage integration between postgraduates from all schools through joint events and collaboration, in activities such as Research Seminars.
- The University's Director of PGT & PGR to work with the Students' Union and PG Society to discuss ways of developing a postgraduate community at Bangor.

CHAPTER 5: A MODERN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Careers guidance, professional development and skills development are key components of a modern postgraduate qualification. Fewer students are reporting that they continue to study at postgraduate level in order to remain in academia, with more students reporting wanting to improve their employment prospects and engage in research opportunities.

PTES 2014 reports that students, for the most part, are benefiting greatly from skills development as part of their programmes, however we are aware however that this response differs between taught and research students. As part of our research we discovered that over half (52%) of respondents, the majority being PGR students, did not attend a Bangor University organised careers or skills development training session this academic year. This is despite feedback from PGR students reporting that they were unhappy with the opportunities to engage in opportunities to enhance their skills. Evidence from PRES 2013 show that the University score was low in providing opportunities to students with personal development plans (31%), 21% was given in providing career advice and 7% for placements/internship opportunities.

52%
OVER HALF
OF RESPONDENTS,
THE MAJORITY BEING
PGR STUDENTS

**DID NOT ATTEND A
BANGOR UNIVERSITY
ORGANISED
CAREERS OR SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT
TRAINING SESSION
THIS ACADEMIC YEAR**

Postgraduate students regularly report being time poor as the reason for not engaging in co-curricular and extra-curricular activity. We therefore sought feedback from students and discovered that the reasons were that most (32%) didn't have the time to attend organised careers or skills development training sessions, 22% were not aware of them and 16% had no interest in these opportunities. The comments provided highlighted students' concerns about not finding the opportunities useful or relevant. Others said that it clashed with other commitments; some reporting it was lack of information.

**EVIDENCE FROM
PRES 2013
SHOW THAT THE
UNIVERSITY
SCORE WAS LOW
IN PROVIDING
OPPORTUNITIES
TO STUDENTS
WITH PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT
PLANS**

31%

21%
**WAS GIVEN
IN PROVIDING
CAREER
ADVICE**

7%
**&
FOR
PLACEMENTS/
INTERNSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES**

A SKILLS FOCUSSED EDUCATION

Transferable skills are essential for a career after University and also support students to recognise the transferability of their skills to other activities and opportunities. Bangor scored 82% in PTES 2014, compared to 77% for the sector average and 36% in PRES 2013 compared to a sector average of 48%.

The University scored highly on questions relating to **'Confidence about independent learning'**, **'preparation for future career'** and **'innovative & creative confidence'**. Positive comments included **'this course has been a confidence builder'** and **'I feel empowered'**. Students also reported wanting **'additional career guidance'** and the need for **'greater practical skills to be taught across PGT courses'**.

Students' Union research found a number of requests from students for additional training opportunities and guidance for students across taught and research programmes. These issues included research and Data Management skills, ethics and copyright guidance, statistics and computer software programmes, and careers training and guidance, especially for research students. Specific training such as interviewing was requested, and applying for grants was also frequently reported. This was also reflected in the PRES 2013 with only 73% receiving training in research skills compared to sector average of 76%.



Job specific training for PhD students looking for lecturing or research jobs would be helpful

I would like to see training within other schools made available for students I think there needs to be a relationship between the different schools and the training facilities they offer

The range of training offered has been very good



Our Manifesto 2014-15 Survey Respondents

The Bangor Employability Award Master provides career guidance for Postgraduate Taught students, and the Students' Union is pleased to see the Careers and Employability Service support the development of postgraduate employability.

Throughout our research we have requested feedback from students on the Bangor Employability Award (BEA), and we make clear and consistent recommendations for the University to enhance the Award. Our Manifesto revealed that the majority of respondents (65%) are not currently participating in the scheme and 35% indicated that they weren't sure how the BEA would help to demonstrate the skills they've developed at University. We would like to investigate this issue further to better understand what students require from a postgraduate employability programme which complements their co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

We are aware that the University does provide a range of training and development opportunities for students to engage with, however our data demonstrates that a large number of students do not engage with these opportunities and we would like to work with the University to understand and address this issue.

Commendation:

- We commend the Doctoral School for the development of a new training programme for Doctoral students, and encourage the School to engage with students and the Students' Union to enhance and refine the programme in line with student feedback.

THE BANGOR EMPLOYABILITY AWARD (BEA)

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS ARE NOT CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING IN THE SCHEME

65%

35% INDICATED THAT

THEY WEREN'T SURE HOW THE BEA WOULD HELP TO DEMONSTRATE THE SKILLS THEY'VE DEVELOPED AT UNIVERSITY.

Recommendations:

- The University to develop an online resource that hosts all training opportunities available to postgraduates to register.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to research the types of training themes and programmes students would like offered.
- The BEA team work with the Students' Union and Postgraduate Students' Society to review the promotion and how the Award is tailored to postgraduates.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to develop a 'Progress Plan Report' so that each research student's development needs are identified and agreed jointly by the student and appropriate staff at the start of the degree.

CHAPTER 6: A 24 HOUR STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Postgraduate students are incredibly diverse and access Higher Education in a number of different ways and for a number of different reasons, and Universities need to provide students with access to resources and support online.

Bangor University has invested heavily in online resources in recent years, ensuring parity of information to students and a range of resources that support students' independent learning. This investment has been recognised in a number of ways, manifesting itself through NSS, PTES and PRES.

According to HEFCW's report

Universities have been positive adopters and advocates of using technology for learning, and distance and open learning courses offer excellent opportunities to tap into knowledge and expertise from afar. Their commitment to embed the use of online resources placed Wales as one of the first – if not the first – national higher education sectors in the world to declare itself an open education nation.

MY(POSTGRADUATE) BANGOR

myBangor is used to provide various online services for students including timetables, exam marks and financial information to name only few features of the new system. myBangor has been a key development for students and has enhanced new undergraduate students' experiences through the introduction of the First Years' site.

Over three quarters (76%) of the students agreed with the statement that they find the myBangor system easy to use. 76% reported using myBangor to access their timetable, 71% for emails, and 68% to access marks. We are pleased that this system is beginning to become integrated as part of student life at Bangor and encourage the University to continue to review the system. A number of our recommendations relate to online services and enhancements that would further support students' learning and the opportunities available to them.

Feedback from respondents suggest that some students had difficulties with the system. Some reported that the system had been difficult to access and a number reporting having to contact administrators for marks and feedback reports as they were unavailable on the system. We hope that these are isolated cases and are confident that ongoing issues such as this will be addressed as they arise. Our recommendations seek to enhance students' access to online services and further develop the services and facilities available to postgraduate students.

Students regularly report that communicating with the University can often be difficult with anecdotal evidence suggesting that information is lost when sent to students by email due to the high volume of material sent through all-student emails. The working group established by the University to review communications to students is welcomed by the Students' Union for this reason.

Commendations:

- We commend the University for its investment in online resources and encourage the University to continue to review its systems in line with student feedback.
- The University to continue encouraging staff and students to use the myBangor system to engage and communicate with the University online, and ensure that student feedback and consultation is a central feature in the University's new Task Group investigating communications.

Recommendation:

- The University's Student Engagement Project Officer to work with the Students' Union to replicate the undergraduate academic year timeline for postgraduate students.

CHAPTER 7: OUR RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Research students regularly comment about the importance of providing a diverse and collaborative research environment within and across academic schools. We are pleased to see a number of schools working to enhance opportunities for students to share their work, and are encouraged by the Doctoral School's emphasis on this issue.

Throughout 2014-15 the Students' Union has worked closely with the Doctoral School to highlight issues and map the areas of development for postgraduate students. The Doctoral School's aim is to integrate a research community at the University with research students at its core, whilst providing support and training for supervisory staff and Doctoral students. Through the Doctoral School, competitions and awards aimed at research students have been established recognising the importance of student's research.

PUBLICISING AND SHARING RESEARCH

A strong research community for postgraduates is key to ensuring that postgraduate students are enhancing a wide range of skills whilst also specialising in their own research and subject area. According to HEFCW **'Universities have signed up to an agreement to support the career development of researchers, which includes promoting equality and diversity in their recruitment and career management'**.

Postgraduate students have reported that whilst there is evidence of a research community within schools, more needs to be done to enhance their provision within Schools and across the institution.

Currently, a high percentage of students (66%) said that their School provides a good range of seminar programmes and the PRES 2013 also reported that BU scored 72% for a **'good seminar programme'** slightly under the sector average of 72%. 67% of students also felt that their School fosters a good research community which coincides with the PRES 2013 findings that the **'research ambience'** scored 64%, 2% higher than the sector average.

Submitting posters or presentations to a seminar/ conference is one way of developing a research community whilst also enhancing students' experiences and skills. Feedback suggests that conference and seminar activity supports the learning process for students and is also a useful way for students to publicise their research work. Just over half of respondents (52%) agreed they have been able to do this but 22% have not had the opportunity. In PRES 2013, BU only scored 64% compared to the sector average of 71% in providing opportunities for research students to attend research conferences.

FEEDBACK SUGGESTS THAT

CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR ACTIVITY SUPPORTS THE LEARNING PROCESS FOR STUDENTS AND IS ALSO A USEFUL WAY FOR STUDENTS TO PUBLICISE THEIR RESEARCH WORK.

52% **AGREED THEY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO THIS**

..... BUT

22% **HAVE NOT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY**

IN **PRES 2013**

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS TO ATTEND RESEARCH CONFERENCES

BANGOR UNIVERSITY ONLY SCORED 64%

COMPARED TO THE SECTOR AVERAGE 71%

RESEARCH FACILITIES AND STUDY SPACES

More than half (58%) reported being able to submit posters or presentations to a seminar or conference outside of Bangor University and feedback from students suggests that this is a well received option among students. 17% of respondents reported not having had the opportunity to do so with additional comments suggesting that in some Schools students had difficulty accessing conferences, due to financial and time constraints. The PRES 2013 reports that only 44% reported having the chance to present a paper or poster at a conference compared to the sector average of 49% and only 26% had the opportunity to submit a paper for publication.

For research work knowledge of copyright, Open Access issues and Creative Commons licences in relation to academic work are incredibly important. Our research found that 38% of students are not confident in their knowledge of copyright issues, with 45% of students reporting not feeling confident in their knowledge of Open Access issues and Creative Commons licences. In order to understand why students' confidence in these areas was low we asked students if they had received training on in these areas, and 43% reported not having been offered opportunities to receive training in these areas.

Services and facilities at the University are extremely important for research students to be able to make the most of their research opportunities. Students want quality facilities to complete research and dedicate time to their studies in a professional and quiet environment.

Consultation and feedback from students suggests that students' access to facilities varies across and within Schools. 'Our Manifesto 14/15' found that students are unhappy with access to office spaces/workstations, specifically for Doctoral candidates. Having a suitable working space scored a range of 53% to 89% across the schools in the PRES 2013 report, but because of the variation BU scored 79% compared to the sector average of 77%. 'Adequate provision of computing resources and facilities' scored 76%, which was lower than the sector average of 78% in the PRES 2013 report. Comments that appeared in our research and through Staff-Student Meetings raised suggestions such as properly arranged rooms with partitions, water facilities and computers as enhancements that could be made to support students' learning and result in improved access to these spaces. Comments also arose around spaces for group and collaborative work, and we would like to see this issue investigated further.

We are pleased that there is now an emphasis on providing a physical space for postgraduates to utilise and encourage the University to develop this space in partnership with students. We also encourage the University to also consider the academic and online spaces available to students.

HAVING A SUITABLE WORKING SPACE

scored a range of **53%** to **89%** across the schools in the PRES 2013 report, but because of the variation BU scored **79%** compared to the sector average of **77%**.

'ADEQUATE PROVISION OF COMPUTING RESOURCES AND FACILITIES'

scored **76%**, which was lower than the sector average of **78%** in the PRES 2013 report.

Recommendations:

- The University to support the development of a research community within Schools and across the institution by sharing best practice through the Doctoral School and Students' Union.
- The Library and Archives Services to work with the Students' Union to provide students with more information, training, and guidance about copyright issues, Open Access issues and Creative Commons licences.
- The University to provide guidance for students on receiving financial support from the University to attend academic conferences.

Recommendations:

- The University to investigate current study spaces available to research students and invest in these areas in line with student feedback.
- The University to investigate, in consultation with students and the Students' Union, as part of the new Science Site redevelopment, the location of a Postgraduate Centre.

THE PRES 2013

REPORTS THAT ONLY **44%** REPORTED HAVING THE CHANCE TO PRESENT A PAPER OR POSTER AT A CONFERENCE

COMPARED TO THE SECTOR AVERAGE OF **49%**

ONLY **26%** HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT A PAPER FOR PUBLICATION

CHAPTER 8: A FAIR DEAL FOR POSTGRADUATES WHO TEACH

Our approach to this issue has been based on the values and principles that postgraduates' contributions to the academic environment deserve respect and recognition, and that students who are provided the opportunity and responsibility of engaging in teaching and learning should be adequately supported to deliver high-quality teaching.

In our last Statement we explored the experiences of postgraduates who teach, specifically concentrating on issues of payment and contracts of employment. We stand by our statement that postgraduates who are involved with teaching are key in developing new teaching and assessment methods, and we would like to see this explored further by Bangor University.

67% OF 'OUR
MANIFESTO 14-15'
RESPONDENTS
AGREED

**I HAVE HAD
THE CHANCE TO
DELIVER TEACHING
IN MY SCHOOL**

[They have] been an excellent lecturer, producing high quality learning experiences in an interactive and novel way. The focus on constant feedback (students opinion of the lecture) was very refreshing, with any difficult topics revisited and improvements applied instantly. [They have] also been available out of department hours, and [their] accessibility/ approachability has been very valuable throughout the module.

**Student-Led Teaching Awards
Nomination, 2014-15**

As part of the University's ongoing work to develop a Code of Practice for the Use of Postgraduates in Teaching we have continued to work with the University's Doctoral School to ensure that there are quality opportunities afforded to students, with robust training and support, which respects the employment rights of those individuals engaged in teaching.

67% of 'Our Manifesto 14-15' respondents agreed to the following statement **'I have had the chance to deliver teaching in my school'** and the PRES 2013 report also shows that opportunities for students to teach scored highly at 59% compared to sector average of 52%. Support and guidance for students engaged in teaching scored 62% against the sector average of 57%. This reflects our understanding that many students would like to take on teaching within their school in order to develop their professional skills and experiences.



I wanted to teach to gain confidence in public speaking and presenting ideas, and experience in lecturing. I enjoyed engaging with students who were interesting in the material. I believe contracts and training are important, particularly because it is hard to know how much time to commit to preparation for teaching, which can hinder research progress. I believe there should clarity in what is expected of postgraduates who are teaching and that the role should be consistent across all departments.

**PhD student, Bangor Students' Union
& PG Society Consultation 2015**

What is concerning is that only 12% of respondents to 'Our Manifesto' agreed that they had been appointed to a teaching role following a selection process, with at least half (51%) being asked directly by a member of staff to carry out teaching. We believe that whilst a significant number of students wish to engage in teaching, the disparity of appointment methods results in a number of individuals missing out on opportunities in this area. We would like to see Schools supported to use proper methods of appointment for all allocated teaching.

Throughout our work in this area we have come to understand that some schools are reliant on postgraduate students to deliver elements of core provision for undergraduate students. We believe that Schools should be provided with the resources to deliver core elements of its curriculum without the reliance on casual teaching staff.

In response to this we investigated the level of training provided to students through school and subject specific teaching and institutional pedagogic training for PG students, to better understand how prepared students are to engage with teaching.

Of our respondents, 31% did not feel that the training they received was useful, however the majority of respondents (43%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'The training I received was useful and satisfactory'. To highlight this PRES 2013 also reports that opportunities were available to students but training was not. There was significant variation between Colleges to the question **'Did you receive formal training for your teaching?'** ranging from 5% to 40%, compared to the sector average of 62%. Bangor Students' Union welcomes the development of the PGCertHE and institutional accreditation for teaching and training provision for PG students, but would recommend a review of postgraduates and school's training requirements.

**THERE WAS SIGNIFICANT
VARIATION BETWEEN
COLLEGES TO THE QUESTION**

**DID YOU RECEIVE
FORMAL TRAINING
FOR YOUR TEACHING?**

**RANGING FROM
5% TO 40%
.....
COMPARED TO
THE SECTOR
AVERAGE OF 62%**

In our last statement we said that “[T]he possession of an employment contract for postgraduates involved in teaching and learning is an essential requirement in ensuring fairness and ensuring that postgraduate students are fully aware of their employment status, and their pay and conditions.”

To reaffirm our commitment to this statement we collected information from students on these issues as part of the Our Manifesto 14-15 process. We found that only 18% of respondents received a contract of employment, with 26% receiving payment through the University’s Pink Slip system. This is a concern where students are expected to develop and prepare teaching materials and assign marks to assessments based on their own academic judgement.

ONLY
18%

OF RESPONDENTS
RECEIVED A
**CONTRACT OF
EMPLOYMENT**

26%

RECEIVING PAYMENT
THROUGH THE
**UNIVERSITY’S
PINK SLIP SYSTEM**

We urge the University to commit to upholding the employment rights of postgraduates through developing clear guidelines and regulations to monitor the activities of postgraduates who teach, and provide employment contracts where required. Furthermore we support the Code of Practice issued for consultation in late 2014/15, and urge the Doctoral School to commit to reviewing the Code once formal institutional training structures are developed.

Of our responses to the statement ‘The payment I received was fair’ 30% agreed and 20% disagreed with the statement. Most of the students (51%) neither agreed nor disagreed, which may be explained by the anecdotal evidence suggesting that a number of students are not paid for completing teaching duties. Our evidence shows that 28% reported that teaching was expected as part of a bursary/studentship and 21% reported that they were ‘unpaid for my teaching’.

28%
REPORTED
THAT

**TEACHING WAS
EXPECTED AS PART
OF A BURSARY/
STUDENTSHIP**

21%
REPORTED
THAT THEY
WERE

**UNPAID
FOR MY
TEACHING**

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University’s Doctoral School for their approach to dealing with the new Code of Practice, and thank them for their willingness to work with students and the Students’ Union on this issue.

Recommendations:

- Doctoral School and HR to ensure that the implementation of University’s new Code of Practice, including recruitment and contracting, is monitored across the institution to ensure fairness and compliance with its principles and requirements.
- The University to adhere to the principles agreed by the Doctoral School when considering the feedback received from Schools on the new Code of Practice.
- The University to ensure clear and flexible recruitment processes for Schools to adhere to during the recruitment of postgraduate students.
- Doctoral School and CELT to work with the Students’ Union to ensure the development of robust training opportunities that reflect the needs of students engaged in teaching.

PGCertHE

We are pleased to see the development of the PGCertHE programme at Bangor University.

We particularly welcome the University’s commitment to ensuring that all new teaching staff receive thorough training, and the opportunity for postgraduate students to enrol on the programme.

Throughout our work with postgraduates this year personal and professional development has been a key theme throughout our discussions. The PGCertHE is a programme that many postgraduates have told us they would benefit from. Despite this we received feedback from students that their thesis Supervisor(s) were unhappy for them to pursue the programme, with 27% of respondents reporting that they did not have the time. We also found some discrepancies among students’ understanding and relevance of the programme to their studies.

This is a recurring theme among doctoral candidates in particular who feel that they are not able to engage in extra-curricular and co-curricular activity due to time restraints.

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University for supporting the personal development of postgraduates as both early academics and professionals, and encourage the University to continue developments in this area.

We found that 19% were aware and planning to enrol on the PGCertHE and 19% of our respondents had already enrolled. Unfortunately a third (33%) of respondents were not aware of the PGCertHE programme, and 29% were aware of the programme but not planning to enrol. We are concerned that whilst the call for training and professional development among Doctoral students is high, students’ engagement with available programmes is low. We therefore make recommendations to improve students’ engagement with professional and skills development programmes across the University.

19%

**WERE AWARE AND
PLANNING TO ENROL
ON THE PGCERTHE**

19%

**HAD ALREADY
ENROLLED**

33%

**WERE NOT AWARE
OF THE PGCERTHE
PROGRAMME**

29%

**WERE AWARE OF THE
PROGRAMME BUT NOT
PLANNING TO ENROL**

Recommendations:

- Doctoral School and CELT to work with the Postgraduate Students’ Society to improve publicity and awareness of the programme and its benefits.
- CELT and the Doctoral School to work with the SU and Postgraduate Students’ Society to develop a robust CPD programme for postgraduates.

CHAPTER 9: THE WELSH LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

FY ADDYSG GYMRAEG

In Bangor University's 2015-2020 strategic plan it is noted that...

“ **We are the leading provider of higher education through the medium of Welsh, in terms of volume, breadth of courses and expertise, and we also the sector's standard bearer for Welsh Language services and support.** ”

Year on year we identify the Welsh language provision of the University as a core strength and make recommendations to further enhance the experiences of students studying through Welsh. As a Students' Union in one of Wales' leading institutions in terms of investment from the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (Coleg) we also see this as an opportunity to affect the wider sector and its development.

The Higher Education for the Nation reports that the number of Welsh medium courses are growing due to support through the Coleg Cenedlaethol Cymraeg. Through the Learned Society of Wales, Welsh higher education teaching and research will be developed and looked after. According to Bangor University **'In collaboration with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, Bangor provides more modules and courses through the medium of Welsh than any other university. Bangor also has the highest number of students studying through the medium of Welsh.'**

Through our research we found that just over half of respondents (51%) thought that the information provided on Welsh-medium module choices were readily available to them when making module choices. This is an area that we would like to better investigate with the University to ensure that students have access to relevant and timely information.

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THOUGHT THAT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON WELSH-MEDIUM MODULE CHOICES WERE READILY AVAILABLE TO THEM WHEN MAKING MODULE CHOICES.

In our 2013-14 Annual Student Statement we recommended that the University reviewed its procedures for students submitting their work to be translated following feedback from students at our Welsh Language Students' Union (UMCB). Over a quarter (27%) in this year's survey agreed that when submitting their work for translation from Welsh to English, seeing the English version before final submission would be beneficial to them.

Commendation:

- We would like to commend the University for its ongoing commitment to Welsh-medium education and services.

36% of respondents reported that there have been opportunities available to them to develop Welsh language skills relevant to their course. 22% said that these opportunities were not available to them. We reported as part of the University's Student Experience Enhancement Strategy the need to develop opportunities for Welsh-medium skills development and would echo that same sentiment in our Statement.

We are extremely pleased to see the Coleg move towards funding subject areas, rather than staff positions only, as this will significantly enhance students' access to subjects that do not traditionally provide students with the opportunity to learn through the medium of Welsh.

We are also pleased to note that the University is investing in the enhancement of Welsh Medium Education through the Welsh Medium Enhancement Fund as part of the institutional Fee Plan that will fund small initiatives to help sustain provision in individual schools where numbers are small.

Recommendations:

- The University to review the opportunities available to students to develop Welsh Language skills relevant to their course.
- The University to ensure that information on Welsh medium modules is readily available to students.
- The University to review the information available to students about Welsh language skills development and employability.

CHAPTER 10: VOCATIONAL POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

PGCE STUDENTS

The experiences of PGCE students are diverse and are dependent on course organisation and support available to them whilst on placement. The Students' Union has increasingly engaged with PGCE and other placement students recently which allows us to draw on casework and data gathered as part of the 'Our Manifesto 14-15' survey.

The evidence that currently exists on PGCE students' experiences is limited and the responses to Our Manifesto were not a large enough sample size for us to consider. We have drawn on casework and recurring themes from Course Reps and individual students to compile this part of the statement.

We are aware that Pastoral and Academic Support, Travel and the availability of information are concerns for students studying on placement, and we are keen to investigate these areas further by working with students and staff from the School of Education and the University's Student Engagement Project Officer.

The Pastoral and Academic Support available to students whilst on placement varies from student to student. We also have some evidence to suggest that not all students are given adequate pastoral support whilst on placement, with a number of student reporting dealing with mental health difficulties as a result of the pressures of studying a full time course and teaching throughout. We asked students whether they felt comfortable talking to their Placement Supervisor/Mentor about a problem, as covered in Chapter 4 (Inclusive, Welcoming and supportive curriculum), and received a varied response to the question.

Following discussions with Course Reps we learnt that students do not always receive information about their placements in sufficient time to allow time for preparation, particularly those students who travel a considerable distance to reach their placement provider. Students have reported struggling to make adequate transport and accommodation arrangements in advance of starting their course, which negatively impacts upon students' retention and academic attainment.

Students have reported that travel costs are an increasing problem for placement students. Many students have told us that they are aware of roughly how much they would need to spend in order to reach their placement provider once placement information was released. However we are unsure how many students agree with this conclusion and need to complete further research into students' access to information about placements prior to starting their course. What is more concerning is the number of students who report struggling financially due to high travel costs, which impacts negatively on retention and academic success.

NUS Wales' report Pound in Your Pocket (2014) found that more than 30% of students who struggle financially are likely to leave their course, with 42% of students reporting that they do not feel able to concentrate on their studies as a result of financial worries.

NUS WALES' REPORT POUND IN YOUR POCKET (2014)

30% OF STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLE FINANCIALLY ARE LIKELY TO LEAVE THEIR COURSE

42% OF STUDENTS REPORTING THAT THEY DO NOT FEEL ABLE TO CONCENTRATE ON THEIR STUDIES AS A RESULT OF FINANCIAL WORRIES

Recommendations:

- University to review the information available to students prior to beginning their course about travel costs and the financial support available to them at the University.
- University to ensure that information is provided to students on placement learning before starting their course, and that confirmation of placements are agreed as early as possible.
- Student Services to review the support and information available to students out-of-hours.
- The University to ensure that all Placement Supervisors/mentors in respective Providers have the opportunity to engage in training and development.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

Bangor University has invested considerably in students and their academic experiences over the last few years. We believe that the University has positively embraced the ethos of partnership, which has manifested itself through improvements in the University's performance in league tables and overall student satisfaction.

The Students' Union is committed to enhancing and championing postgraduate education and postgraduate students and will continue to challenge and support the University in areas that require enhancement. We recognise the role that we must play in thinking creatively about addressing the challenges that postgraduate students face, and ensuring a flexible education system that supports students as individuals and allows students to thrive. The challenges facing the sector, institutions and postgraduate students continue to grow and we are confident that the University will continue to embrace those challenges as it has done for undergraduate students.

There are a number of positive examples of improvement in postgraduate education, in areas such as teaching and learning, research support, and supervisor support, to name a few. We have recognised that there are areas for development at Bangor and are confident that the University will work with students to address these issues as it has done with issues raised at undergraduate level in recent years. We are confident that the University's provision will continue to improve whilst staff across the institution work to enhance postgraduate education in the same vein as undergraduate education. We are encouraged by positive responses from students to Our Manifesto 2014/2015 and recent Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research Surveys, and believe that through further investment in postgraduate students and through ensuring that all students are partners in their education, Bangor will continue to see similar strides in student satisfaction for postgraduate students as undergraduate students.

We look forward to working with the University to address the recommendations made in this report, to realise students' vision for postgraduate education at Bangor, and we encourage the University to continue to invest in the postgraduate experience as it has already started to do.