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BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

BANGOR UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

ANNUAL STUDENT STATEMENT

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STUDENTS' UNION

BANGOR UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION:

As in the two previous years, 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: investment in teaching spaces; the provision of prompt and detailed feedback; investment in online resources such as myBangor, Talis Aspire, and an online marking system; our Course Representative system, our widely-acknowledged commitment to pastoral support, and for providing a safe and welcoming environment for students; for our training programme for Doctoral students, and our approach to dealing with the new Code of Practice; for the induction and welcome programme for both PGT and PGR students; for our inclusive curriculum; for our new Library Champions project; for our commitment to the Welsh language; and finally for the inclusion and positive engagement with student representatives on University Committees.

These are excellent examples of our partnership working, and we are pleased to see that the Students' Union expresses their recognition of this.

It is also good to note that, since last year, Bangor has seen a continued level of excellence in its NSS performance, maintaining our position as best in Wales, and in the top 10 within the UK, and with some very positive changes in a number of Schools. Many of these changes have emerged from our joint working with the Student Union, and we are again pleased to see that this work has borne fruit.

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

1. QAA MID CYCLE REVIEW REPORT

Recommendation 1:

The University to work with schools with a semester two intake, in order to ensure there are comparable inductions and welcome events.

This is an important area of inconsistency across the University, driven primarily by the fact that the Admissions cycle is anomalous for this small group of students, and is not one that can ever be entirely addressed (for example, January intake students will miss the all-University experience of Welcome Week). Nevertheless, the University has worked to gradually improve the welcome and induction for this group. Further improvements will be made this coming year, and led primarily by staff in CoBLESS (where the majority of students are academically located)

Recommendation 2:

The University and Bangor College to work with the Students' Union to ensure that access to information and representation is transparent and available to students studying in CSUFT.

Setting up Bangor College China has been a complex operation, not made any simpler by language, geographical, cultural and software/bandwidth differences between the sites. Nevertheless, we are committed to providing equivalent access to information, and indeed representation, wherever possible – i.e. that equivalence of experience is the default position, and differs only when there are clearly identified reasons for this.

Recommendation 3:

The University to investigate programme level module evaluation for students.

The current system of module evaluation has been in place for 3 academic years, and we are now in a position to review its effectiveness. We are pleased with the valuable information that module evaluation has provided us with, and are open to moving to programme-level evaluations to enable us to get a broader snapshot of students' experiences across their course. CELT (and especially Dr Andy Webb and Jo Caulfield) are happy to work with the Students' Union, and Directors of Teaching and Learning, to develop a proposal for programme-level evaluation.

Recommendation 4:

The University to provide the Students' Union with access to module evaluation data that can be used to inform our representational work

The issue here is (and has always been) that our original agreement with campus staff Unions was that the data are provided to the staff members who teach the course, and those who line manage them. Provided that the data are anonymous, and that the Unions agree to this use of the data, we have no objections in principle. Dr Andy Webb (in English, and the CELT team) is the staff member responsible, and will be happy to discuss this issue.

Recommendation 5:

The University to identify staff responsible for the Postgraduate Annual Statement and work with the Union to implement the recommendations.

The responsible staff are the Dr Malhotra for PGR (the Director the Doctoral School) and Dr Rayment for PGT. Please feel free to contact them. In addition, during the next academic year, Directors of Student Engagement will work with the Student Engagement Officer and Students' Union to develop Postgraduate Experience Plans for their School, incorporating the recommendations from the Postgraduate Annual Statement where appropriate.

2. UNIVERSITY UPDATE SINCE LAST STATEMENT

Recommendation 6:

The University to work with the Students' Union to implement a communication strategy for the Student Charter in order to highlight its purpose and content.

We are happy to work with the Students' Union to increase the prominence of the Student Charter. This will be taken forward by the PVC Students and the Director of Student Experience. Various communication routes will be used, including MyBangor and Directors of Student Engagement.

Recommendation 7:

The University to work with the Students' Union and course reps to look at feedback relating to the BEA in order to improve students understanding of the scheme and further investigate the reasons behind why students are not taking part or aiming to complete the Award.

The University welcomes the opportunity to continue working with the SU to further development engagement with the BEA and its related employability activities. The University monitors levels of engagement through our online system and so can supplement the SU's survey of 33% engagement from their sample with the actual figure of 49% of undergraduates, and 41% of the total student population. We monitor engagement across individual Schools, and so know that levels of engagement varies enormously (from 27% to 90%). The University would welcome the Students' Unions collaboration in our plans to target schools with lower engagement in order to better engage their students in the award.

With regards to levels of completion, we benchmark across the sector, and so know that our completion rates, whilst low, are typical of employability awards in other HE institutions. For this reason, the BEA has been designed to be a flexible and comprehensive scheme, and completion is not required in order to experience employability enhancements. By making the BEA the mechanism for recording extra-curricula activities for the HEAR, all students can utilise the BEA in a way that will enhance their employability, irrespective of whether they choose to complete the award. Finally, we note that the implementation of the BEA as an institutional framework for engaging students in employability-related activities has coincided with year on year improvements in Bangor's performance in the DLHE survey, with employment now being at an all time high at 93.8%. The University would be happy to work with the Students' Union to build on this success, and continue to enhance employability provision both within Schools and centrally.

Recommendation 8:

The University to work with the Students' Union to further roll out the draft Joint Honours charter to all colleges and schools.

The University will continue to develop this aspect of our work together with the Students' Union, and seek ways to ensure it is further embedded within existing policies. Care will need to be taken to ensure that this charter does not conflict with the overall Student Charter. This may be overcome by changing it to either a Code of Practice or set of guidelines.

Recommendation 9:

The University to ensure that all joint honours students have a personal tutor in each school.

This seems a reasonable aspiration, which we have worked on in previous years, with some success, but also incomplete compliance. It seems best to work with the Senior Tutors Group, who have responsibility for the monitoring and review of this policy.

3.

THE BANGOR UNIVERSITY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Recommendation 10:

The University to work with the Students' Union to investigate further the usage at each library and ensure there is a parity of experience for all students in terms of access to library resources and reading lists.

The issue of electronic reading lists has been a regular theme in the Library and Archives Task Group, including various approaches to implementation in a number of actions across Schools. The issue of parity of experience in terms of access is more complex, but we are happy to work together on both issues. This will form a core element of planning for Library resources under the developing Estates Strategy.

Recommendation 11:

The University to ensure that Wednesday afternoons are free from academic study for all students.

There has been substantial progress on this issue over recent years, and we have compliance for almost all students, in almost all Schools. Exceptions are often explicable on academic grounds, and tend to be exceptions made with the student's consent. However, we are keen to work on achieving full compliance by addressing the exceptional cases. It is hoped that with the opening of Pontio, larger classes will be more easily accommodated thus lifting pressure on the timetable.

Recommendation 12:

The University to work with the Students' Union to investigate the student experience for home students, to ensure it is comparable with students living in Bangor.

The University is keen to develop practice in this area, as the number of home-based students increases. This will be taken forward by the PVC (Students) and the Director of Student Experience.

4. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Recommendation 13:

The University to support the Students' Union and work together to deliver a student-led Teaching and Learning Strategy.

We are happy to consider work on such a Strategy. However, the details clearly need to be thought through – so that any document addresses the core issues of teaching and learning, not merely the immediate concerns of one particular cohort of students.

Recommendation 14:

The University to ensure that all extra course costs are clearly defined to students and where possible, eliminate or subsidise some of these costs.

The aspiration of 'clear definition where possible' is a very reasonable one, and we have a working group addressing this issue, chaired by Prof Tully. The issue of elimination or subsidy of costs is more complex, and has clear financial implications. In viewing this matter, we also note that Bangor already offers many more free services than most British universities, including free Clubs and Societies, and Languages for All, and that there is already funding available (on a means-tested basis) to help with field trip costs etc. However, the University acknowledges that more needs to be done to ensure that students are made aware of the likely costs incurred during their studies. This will be taken forward by the PVC (Students) and the Director of Student Experience.

Recommendation 15:

The University to review the procedure on the number of copies required for printing, including dissertation printing and binding, and review the cost to print for students.

We are happy to discuss these issues, perhaps best raised at the IT Services Task Group.

5. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Recommendation 16:

The University to ensure that marking criteria is available in all schools and publicised in the same place in order to ensure students are aware of the documentation.

There has been substantial progress on this issue, both in poster and electronic form. Dr Fran Garrad-Cole is the key contact for Assessment and Feedback within CELT.

Recommendation 17:

The University to ensure there are clear guidelines on what detailed feedback should look like for students and ensure this is available to both staff and students throughout the year.

This is an important issue, which we will be working on throughout 2015-16. We note that Schools are required to make this information available on their websites and via Blackboard and MyBangor. Again, Dr Garrad-Cole is the key contact.

Recommendation 18:

The University to investigate using and either/or system where students can provide either an online copy or a hard copy depending on their preference.

We are happy to at least consider this issue. However, we note that on-line submission has enormous advantages for both students and the University (saving paper and print costs, speed of submission, submission from a distance, options of electronic marking, long term record keeping and storage, and plagiarism checking). We are happy to acknowledge, however, that this issue may vary from discipline to discipline.

6. COURSE REPRESENTATIVES

Recommendation 19:

The University to work with the Students' Union to ensure that minutes of Staff Student Committee meetings are sent to the SU in a timely manner.

The University will support the Students' Union to ensure that minutes of Staff Student Committees (SSLiCs) are sent to the appropriate people, and would encourage the Students' Union to report to the Quality Assurance and Validation Task Group when minutes are not received. Student administration staff (who write the minutes of SSLiCs) will include a nominated Students' Union person on the minutes circulation list.

Recommendation 20:

Schools to work with the Students' Union to ensure that SSLiC agenda's include standing items such as; NSS, as highlighted in this document.

Directors of Student Engagement will be briefed on the importance of ensuring the NSS Action Plans are standing agenda items for their Staff Student Committee. We will also remind Schools of this at the NSS Action Planning Conferences, and when the Action Plans are circulated to staff and students in each school. The Code of Practice for Course Representation to be amended to incorporate this recommendation.

Recommendation 21:

Schools to work with the SU to increase the profile of the course rep system in their schools and colleges.

The University is happy to provide any support required by the Students' Union to ensure the course representative system is given the prominence it deserves, across all Schools.

7. INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Recommendation 22:

The University to include an option of 'Mx' as a gender neutral title, in the registration process, as well as an 'other' free text box options for students who prefer an alternative title.

We are happy to consider this request. However, we note that there may be an issue of matching other databases (such as UCAS). One possibility may be a more local trial, which does not include database entries, in order to estimate uptake and establish whether there are implementation issues.

Recommendation 23:

The Students' Union, with support from the University, to develop a research project focussing on the issue of the BME attainment gap.

We are happy to consider at this, and have already begun discussion with the SU on taking this forward.

Recommendation 24:

The University to issue inclusivity training to staff.

The University's new Student Experience Enhancement Strategy has a specific section outlining its commitment to ensure that inclusivity and equality training is provided to staff across the University. Initial steps to take this forward have been agreed at the University's Equality and Diversity Task Group, and the first meeting taken place with the Students' Union to agree the priority areas for training. We will continue to work with the Students' Union to develop training that is responsive to the needs of our diverse student body.

Recommendation 25:

The University to add an additional question into module evaluation to see if students have felt included in their curriculum.

We note that there is regular pressure, from a number of sources, to include new questions in Module Evaluation, and we are aware that of the issue of questionnaire fatigue amongst students. Nevertheless, this is an important issue, and the University will work with the Students' Union to explore how such a question might be incorporated into module evaluation, or any future programme-level evaluation. Jo Caulfield seems the most appropriate point of contact.

8.

LIBRARY & LEARNING RESOURCES

Recommendation 26:

The University to work with the Students' Union to develop a communication strategy for the Library to ensure students are fully aware of the availability of the services.

We would be happy to work together on such a strategy.

Recommendation 27:

The University to investigate the feasibility of a café or food preparation area for students studying when food and catering services in the University are closed.

We are aware that catering facilities are an issue that students often raise. The Student Experience Strategy commits us to benchmarking our student catering facilities to other universities, and we are happy to work on developing better catering facilities where possible.

9.

WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION

Recommendation 28:

The University to work with UMCB to support the Union's calls for a strategy for student representation across the Coleg.

The University is happy to do this, and suggests that the most appropriate way forward is for UMCB to work with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's branch officer at BU, Eirian Jones, in order to establish a context for the effective lobbying of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. Additionally, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students) is happy to meet with UMCB and the SU in order to examine the relationship between student representation at BU and ways in which BU students are represented in national bodies such as the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

Recommendation 29:

The University to promote the option for students to submit work in Welsh or English, whatever the language of their module.

The option to submit work in Welsh or English, whatever the language of the module, is a principle that is enshrined in the University's Welsh Language Scheme. The University, through a variety of means, encourages students to use and develop their Welsh language skills. From the outset of their time in Bangor, students are reminded of the benefits of doing so, from a cognitive, cultural and employability perspective. Indeed, Bangor ensures its status as the lead provider of Welsh medium education in the HE sector because of its tireless efforts over a number of years to ensure a depth and breadth of Welsh medium provision for its students. By now, it is possible to study Welsh medium modules in all of Bangor's academic Schools, and the University strives to recruit as many students as possible onto those modules, which ensures as holistic a Welsh medium experience as possible for students.

Separate from this issue, the principle of being able to present work in Welsh whatever the language of the module remains an important one, which the University shall continue to promote.

The University supports students to use and develop their Welsh language skills through, for example:

- Gloywi Iaith (Welsh Language Improvement) courses, both stand alone and as part of study skills modules in many Schools.
- Simultaneous translation for students wishing to present their work in Welsh to a mixed-language group
- Numerous electronic resources both general and subject specific. For example, Cygliad (electronic spell-checker and dictionary package) is available to all students and training on how to use Cysgliad is offered during Welcome Week and as part of study skills modules.
- Information sessions on studying and using Welsh at the University and beyond, for example: bespoke sessions for Welsh speaking students during Welcome Week; and a Welsh Jobs Fair to raise awareness amongst students for the need for Welsh speakers in the workplace.
- Our students receive information booklets and training sessions that underline the opportunities to use Welsh in a variety of context and in particular as part of academic courses. Similarly, our staff receive regular information bulletins and training sessions on the importance of promoting the use of Welsh in academic courses (even on modules that are not coded as Welsh medium modules) and our administrative systems are continuously being developed to promote the use of Welsh in as many modules as possible.
- A Welsh Language Scheme that ensures that students have access to all services in Welsh, thus encouraging the use of Welsh, and ensuring its status as an 'official' and 'natural' part of life at Bangor University.

Recommendation 30:

The University to promote the availability of translation services for students submitting work in Welsh for English-language modules.

As mentioned above, the University promotes the use of Welsh by students through a variety of means. We will continue to ensure that both staff and students are aware of the translation services available to students to allow them to submit their work in Welsh. This principle is already included in the Welsh Language Scheme and the relevant process outlined in the Regulations for Taught Programmes (6.5 Submitting Work in Welsh).

BANGOR UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

CONCLUSION:

Yet again, the University welcomes a positive and well-organised Student Union Annual Statement. Though lengthy, the documents offer a rounded and considered summary of joint activities with the University, and the list of Commendations and Recommendations seem both practical and appropriate.

There has again been engagement with the Student Union on a wide range of topics, which appears to have produced impressive outcomes in the NSS. As our Response makes clear, we expect to work with the Student Union on a range of further improvements, the better to develop our University for present and future students.

Prof. Oliver Turnbull

Pro Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)

August 2015



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