

Bangor University response
to the 2012-13 Student Union Annual Statement

Introduction:

The University is delighted that the overall tone of the Student Union Annual Statement is positive: especially as regards our investment and enhancement of our IT systems; our Personal Tutor System, our libraries and learning resources, our commitment to Welsh-medium study, our level of student engagement, and indeed our strong partnership with the Students' Union.

On the more specific issues that are raised in the document, our Response addresses each of the Recommendations in turn. In passing, we note that, because of issues of timing (the release of the Annual Statement in October 2013), the University Response is based on suggestions already implemented.

Recommendations of its last audit/review?

- *Academic Schools to work with the University (Student Voice Project Officer) and the Students' Union to tackle closing the feedback loop to its' students.*

These are University-wide issues, and not ideal for dissemination at the level of individual students in Schools – though the Registry did provide some material on this topic for a Student Union Facebook site. In addition, the issue has been discussed in a number of meetings of the Institutional Group. David Fordham and David Wright have also met with the SU President to discuss how to best structure a response. The Student Engagement Project would also be a useful forum to discuss how to explore this issue.

Teaching and Learning

- *Academic schools to work with the Students' Union to co-create a system that reports actions based on student feedback provided in their module evaluation forms*

This a key issue, and has been addressed in a number of ways: Placing module evaluation data in Electronic Handbooks with School responses (planned for summer 2014); a series of 'Student suggestions implemented' posters (already in place); and suggestions to lecturers to use part of Lecture 1 of a semester to report back on last year's suggestions (already in place). Staff-student Liaison Committees would also be useful in this regard.

- *The Students' Union to work with the University to roll out the Share and Inspire lecture series year round, in order to allow staff to share best practice on their teaching styles and innovative learning resources.*

There are already plans for a further roll out of Share-and-inspire, as part of the activities of the proposed Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) unit.

- *Academic Schools to include external examiners reports on the agenda of their SSLiC/Board of Studies or ensure that these reports are clearly identified on their individual school pages.*

It is now a University requirement that External Examiners reports are made available to all students. Schools have been asked to ensure that reports are placed in a position where they can be accessed (e.g a School Blackboard site). They have also been asked to ensure that they are discussed at Staff Student Committees and in Boards of Study and for such consideration to be recorded in the minutes. We are working, at committee level, on the question of how we might structure the Agendas of School Boards of Studies to facilitate this reporting.

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to devise and develop a project that allows students and/or course reps to feed into the design, development and review of modules.*

In principle, this is a good idea - but could be carried out in a number of ways, and needs careful implementation. We have opted to pilot the notion of student input into revalidation in a small number of Schools, so establish which approaches are most effective. A project is under way in the School of Modern Languages in 2013 and in Chemistry in 2014 that will see students providing input into the Internal Quality Audit and course revalidation processes. This is being led by the Students' Union and the Student Engagement Project Officer.

- *Academic schools to work with the SU and their course reps to clearly promote the role of a course rep detailing how reps feed into areas such as audit, revalidation, and boards of studies etc.*

In the last year there has been engagement between Course Representatives and the PVCs (Students) and (Teaching & Learning), at a number of meetings open to all Course Representatives. We would be happy to continue/increase this level of engagement, and work on further approaches to engagement.

Assessment and Feedback:

- *At the point when an assignment is set, academic schools to provide a return date for assignment feedback to enable students to know exactly when feedback on their work will be available.*

Much of what is mentioned in this section is dealt with via the 'Minimum standards of assessment and feedback practice' that were approved and circulated as part of the Student Experience Enhancement Strategy. As part of the 'minimum standards', staff have to let students know when they will get feedback, avoid clumping of deadlines etc. We are working to ensure that this is standard practice in all Schools, including through discussions with Schools. We especially note that our NSS score increased by some 5% in the 2013 scores (based on data gathered in early 2013), so that this process appears to have been effective.

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to review the code of practice on feedback.*

We note that there is no formal Code of Practice on the topic of feedback (with information distributed elsewhere in the regulations). The Minimum standards regulation (see above) may be sufficient here, and we are happy to discuss this at the Teaching and Learning Task Group.

Learning Resources:

- *The University to work with the SU to develop systems to allow for formal feedback on IT provision that does not solely rely on end of module evaluations.*

We would be happy to work on this at the Information Systems Task Group. In addition, the Director of Information Services is in regular contact with the Student Union.

- *The University to continue to work with the SU to define and develop minimum standards of BlackBoard.*

This item is being followed up by staff from Information Services, and is scheduled for discussion in our Information Services Task Group.

- *The IT department to continue to work closely with the SU and obtain feedback from Course Rep Council on relevant issues.*

This discussion seems best managed through the Information Systems Task Group.

Library Provision & Opening hours

- *The Library service to continue to work with the Students' Union to investigate the student to book ratio and consider further investment in this area.*

There has been roughly £500 000 additional investment in the Library book fund, which makes it surprising that this has been raised as a formal issue. It may be that it is less visible to students because much of this investment is in the digital domain? The introduction of the Talis Aspire reading list system should also allow for better control over this area.

- *The University to review, with the Students' Union, the 24 hour library trial and if successful, commit to funding thereafter.*

The 24-hour system has now been fully implemented, and will run through the academic year.

Unfair Practice:

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to collate feedback on plagiarism and review the code of practice and its dissemination to schools accordingly.*

We were surprised to see this item appearing as a Recommendation. There has been extensive work with the Student Union on the plagiarism issue, in a number of Task Groups. We appear to have built a policy that is both fair and logistically manageable, and appears in the University Handbook. We also do not have

indications of it being implemented unequally across Schools.

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to promote the rules surrounding plagiarism to students clearly and effectively.*

As noted above, there has been progress on this issue, though it the question of communicating the regulations to students remains challenging.

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to review the procedure for requesting special circumstances and support during exam periods.*

The management of this, via MyBangor, is a priority for development in 2013/14.

Inter-department communication for Joint Honours students:

- *The University and Students' Union to review the Personal Tutor trial in the College of Arts and Humanities and duplicate appropriate systems for joint honours students in all colleges for 2014-15.*

This is planned.

- *Academic Schools to review assignment deadlines to avoid 'clumping'.*

There have been meetings with Schools to request that assessment is better distributed across the Semesters. We would welcome feedback on whether this has been effective in the 2013-14 academic year.

- *The Students' Union to work with the University to facilitate annual focus groups for Joint Honours students.*

An event on this topic is planned for January 2014, aimed at Joint Honours students across Arts and Humanities.

- *The University and Students' Union to investigate the feasibility of Joint Honours Course Reps.*

This is a topic appropriate for discussion at the Teaching and Learning Task Group.

The quality of the public information

- *The University to work with the Students' Union to ensure that the Student Charter is promoted to students.*

This has been widely publicised, and is available in the electronic Handbook, and on MyBangor.

- *The Student's Union to add a question about the Charter to the annual survey, Our Manifesto.*

This Recommendation applies – of course - to the Student Union (rather than the University)

Welsh Medium Education:

- *The University to work with the Students' Union and UMCB to ensure that adequate provision is made in terms of replacing the Premium and that provision continues to be enhanced.*

This is first and foremost a political question. BU has been working (and will continue to work) with other universities in Wales to lobby Welsh government on a number of related issues which impact upon the question of the Welsh-medium Premium.

- *Academic schools to work with the Students' Union to review their provision of Welsh medium education.*

The PVC for Welsh Medium is ensuring that academic schools review their provision of Welsh-medium education.

- *The University to continue to work with UMCB, to continue to improve the experiences of Welsh speaking students.*

The PVC for Welsh Medium is in close contact with UMCB and sees the continuation and development of this relationship as a priority.

Conclusion:

The University welcomes this first Student Union Annual Statement. It offers a balanced acknowledgement of the existing work of the University, together with a list of various suggestions for improvement. As our Response makes clear, there has been engagement on all of the topics identified in the 2013-14 academic year, and we look forward to working with the Student Union to further enhance the quality of the student experience in future years.