



UNDEB MYFYRWYR  
BANGOR  
STUDENTS' UNION

# ANNUAL STUDENT STATEMENT

[WWW.BANGORSTUDENTS.COM](http://WWW.BANGORSTUDENTS.COM)

# 2013 2014

PARITY OF EXPERIENCE

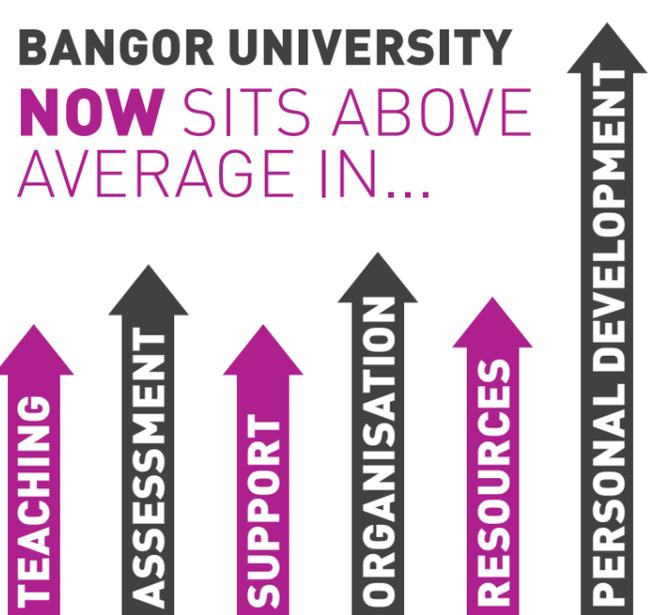
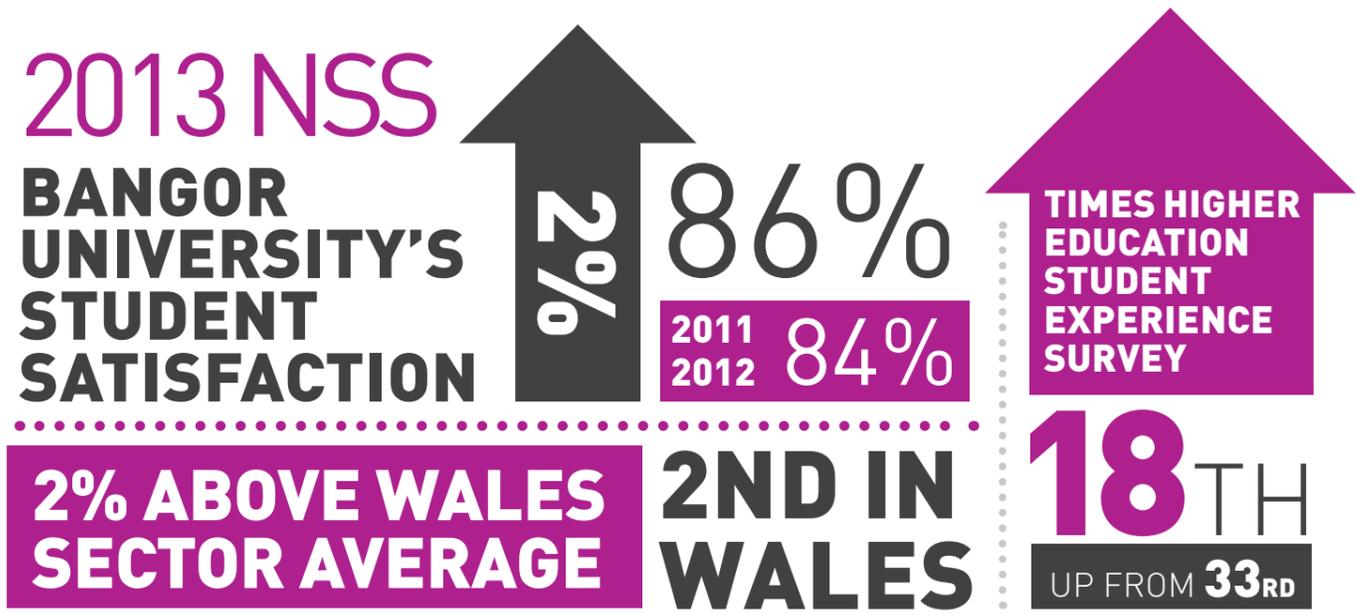
INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION

EMPLOYABILITY

THE POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE



# INTRODUCTION:

Bangor University is always striving to improve the student experience. The primary purpose of this document is to highlight areas that we believe should be considered by the institution as an area for development and to invest in, in addition to areas in which students inform us are praiseworthy and as a result, we would recommend for sharing as best practice. Whilst the annual statement is a Students' Union owned document, we are keen to increasingly work in partnership with schools and the institution as a whole, to deliver on the recommendations that we make throughout this document.

The partnership between Bangor University and its Students' Union has been growing from strength to strength during this last academic year. Increasingly, the SU has been working with staff, (such as the Student Engagement Project Officer, Heads of Services such as IT and Library, staff in the Quality Assurance Unit and Student Services) on projects to enhance the student voice and strengthen the concept of students as partners beyond just an idea, with the aim of embedding it into the culture of the organisation. Although there is still some way to go, it is clear that the institution is committed to ensuring that students have a say in their education. This is evident through the creation of joint projects with the Students' Union such as; student submissions into Internal Quality Audits and Revalidation panels, staff and student NSS action plan conferences, College of Arts and Humanities joint honours charter consultation and the many committee's in which there is genuine student representation and consultation.

In order to compile this year's submission, we have drawn on evidence from the SU's annual survey 'Our Manifesto' (1035 responses), course representative council meetings; focus groups and an additional survey which was provided to students at the SU General Meeting. In addition, we also used minutes from University committee meetings such as Teaching and Learning, School's Staff-Student Liaison Committee's and the student submissions for their respective Internal Quality Audits and Revalidation (Modern Languages and Chemistry). Furthermore, research conducted by the Students Union in regards to specific issues such as plagiarism and Wednesday afternoon's has also provided us with additional data. Some of what is reported in this document is anecdotal, however, we always strive to ensure that SU campaigns are evidenced based and student led, and we would therefore not make any recommendations without sufficient student feedback.

## UNIVERSITY UPDATE SINCE LAST STATEMENT

Since the last National Student Survey (NSS) Bangor University's student satisfaction overall result has increased by 2%, from 84% to 86%. This makes Bangor 2% above the sector average for Wales and 2nd overall in Wales in terms of the survey's results. Whilst judging academic satisfaction through the survey alone has its limitations, it is fair to say that staff at Bangor University, both at an academic school and senior management team level, have worked extremely hard over the last year in order to improve the student experience. Bangor University now sits above average in each of the six categories of the NSS (Teaching, Assessment, Support, Organisation, Resources, and Personal development) and its investment in this area is also evident in its promotion from 33rd to 18th in the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey.

### After the publication of the 2012-13 NSS results the University noted that;

“ This last year we have especially worked at ways of improving the feedback process. It was wonderful to see that the 'Promptness of feedback' score (our lowest in 2011-12) has now increased by an impressive 9%. Our overall scores for Assessment and Feedback are up by 5%, placing us well above the Welsh average. ”

It is encouraging to see that the area in which the University scored lowest the previous year has improved dramatically and we hope to see a further increase in satisfaction this academic year after working with schools on the recommendations in regards to assessment and feedback from the last statement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS SINCE LAST STATEMENT

In the 2012-13 annual statement, we highlighted the following areas in which we believed the University needed to look at in order to enhance the student experience; closing the feedback loop to students, the availability of external examiners reports, students feeding into the design, development and review of modules, student feedback, the provision of welsh medium education, rules and regulations surrounding plagiarism and learning resources. We are extremely pleased with the University's response to our first annual statement and have appreciated the opportunity to engage with the institution at various committees and levels throughout the year on the issues we raised on behalf of the student body.

Whilst some of the issues raised are longer term aspirations, such as; "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" they are now on the University's agenda and we will be working with staff on a variety of projects, such as the Student Experience Enhancement Strategy, to ensure that any recommendations that are yet to be resolved are picked up at a strategic level.

**Most notably, we would like to commend the University for how it received our first annual statement and taken on board its recommendations. We can happily report that many of these have already been met (external examiner's reports on websites, the roll out of the Share and Inspire lecture series, the development of student submissions into internal quality audits and revalidation). We are also pleased to see conversations continuing, both at a school and senior management level in regards to recommendations such as plagiarism, and formal feedback for services such as IT.**

We are looking forward to discussing this document with the University and working with schools and staff on the recommendations that have come out of this year's student feedback.

# SECTION ONE:

# PARITY OF EXPERIENCE

This section looks at the comparable experiences of students at a school level and makes recommendations in order to create consistencies and promote equal opportunities and provisions for all students.

SCHOOL HANDBOOKS

PLAGIARISM

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS

JOINT HONOURS & COMMUNICATION

**COURSE REPS** and **STUDENTS** alike, have been **EXPRESSING CONCERNS** in regards to the **move from a PHYSICAL school-based handbook to the new ONLINE version**

Currently, **handbooks** are **COLLEGE WIDE** with a **specific section for school specific information**. Feedback from **PEER GUIDES** and **COURSE REPS** suggest that **STUDENTS BELIEVE THIS INFORMATION IS NOT DETAILED ENOUGH**, particularly for **first year students**, and that the old style, **PAPER-BASED HANDBOOK** were **MORE EFFECTIVE**.

# SCHOOL HANDBOOKS

Annually, Bangor Students' Union surveys students based upon feedback we have received during the previous academic year and semester one of the current year. The topics we research come from sources such as; Course Representative Council, Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings, Students' Union Senate and ideas in line with the current Officer's Manifestos. During semester one of this academic year, course reps and students alike, have been expressing concerns in regards to the move from a physical school-based handbook to the new online version. As a result, we decided to include a question about the handbook in this year's 'Our Manifesto' annual survey. The data we collected was analysed by school and it became apparent that there is a disparity between schools on both how the handbook is received by students and how accessible the information provided in the handbook is.

In addition, we have also received feedback in some schools from Peer Guides, who in some schools have requested that we make the recommendation of schools returning to a paper-based, hardcopy handbook. Currently, handbooks are college wide with a specific section for school specific information. Feedback from peer guides and course reps suggest that students believe this information is not detailed enough, particularly for first year students, and that the old style, paper-based handbook were more effective.

The University has been doing some work itself in this area, in terms of the first year experience and has itself been provided with data that compliments the narrative that the SU has been receiving from the student body. When first year students were surveyed in the College of Arts and Humanities on the question "The online student handbook was useful to me" it is clear that again, there is disparity amongst the student population. Out of the 6 schools surveyed, 3 schools scored a mark of zero for 'strongly agree' to the statement and many of the schools scored a higher percentage of disagree compared to agreeing with the statement.

It is clear that the University needs to consider this feedback as a high priority area of investigation. Often, the handbook is the place students are sent by staff to seek out information, and if this is not being seen as an easily accessible document, then students will disengage with the University's procedures and in some cases, the learning experience will suffer considerably.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to invest in the first year experience and consider the recommendations made as part of this section when implementing any changes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to work with the Students' Union to do some usability testing on students in order to identify the areas where the specific handbook problems are occurring.
- The University to investigate the option of school specific handbooks.
- The University to provide staff training on how to access and support students in using the online handbook.

WHEN **FIRST YEAR STUDENTS** WERE SURVEYED IN THE **COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES** ON THE QUESTION

“**THE ONLINE STUDENT HANDBOOK WAS USEFUL TO ME**” **3 OUT OF 6 SCHOOLS SCORED A MARK OF ZERO FOR 'STRONGLY AGREE'**

**MANY OF THE SCHOOLS SCORED A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF DISAGREE COMPARED TO AGREEING WITH THE STATEMENT**

Do you understand the rules regarding plagiarism?

**96% YES**

Do you know what would happen if you are suspected of unfair practice (eg plagiarism)?

**85% YES**

Many students being **COMPLETELY UNAWARE** that they could **SELF-plagiarise** or that **plagiarism could be UNINTENTIONAL**.

**MISPLACED UNDERSTANDING** THERE WOULD NOT BE **CONSEQUENCES** in the form of **MARK CAPPING** and/or **MARKS OF ZERO**.

After spending **2 weeks speaking to students and informing them about the rules and regulations**, we found that **many students became much more informed** and when asked again at a later date, could correctly define plagiarism in their own words. In addition, **ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS** that the campaign may have had an influence on the **DECREASE** in the number of suspected cases of **PLAGIARISM DURING THAT EXAM PERIOD**.

# PLAGIARISM

In the last statement we highlighted the fact that many students do not understand the rules regarding plagiarism and what the consequences are, if they are suspected. We decided to investigate it further this year by launching a campaign during the exam period in January called 'Study Aid.' In this campaign, not only did we survey students to find out their level on understanding of plagiarism, we also provided information about the University's definition and consequences if they are suspected of it. When surveyed, what we found was the majority of students claimed to understand the rules; 96% of students answered yes to the question "Do you understand the rules regarding plagiarism?" However, fewer students identified that they were aware of the consequences with only 85% stating 'yes' to "Do you know what would happen if you are suspected of unfair practice (eg plagiarism)?"

In the Academic Representation Unit, a large proportion of our casework is dealing with students who have problems with plagiarism or suspected of unfair practice. This appeared on the surface to contradict our research so we decided to follow this up during 'Study Aid' event and ask students to identify the correct definition of plagiarism according to the University and the correct consequence as outlined in the code of practice. What was phenomenal to discover was that despite the overwhelming view in our original survey that concluded that students did believe that they understood the rules regarding plagiarism, what was clear from the further investigations was that this was not always the case.

- “**Copying/paraphrasing/reproducing work without referencing authors**”
- “**When you take credit for work and/or findings that aren't yours**”
- “**Having the same words in your own work that have previously been published in another person's work/online, unless put in quotation marks**”

Qualitative data from 'Study Aid' 2014

When asked to identify the correct definition, there was a large disparity across schools, with many students being completely unaware that they could self-plagiarise or that plagiarism could be unintentional. Many students were of the opinion that you would only face the consequences if the alleged plagiarism was on purpose and that it was a misplaced understanding there would not be consequences in the form of mark capping and/or marks of zero.

After spending 2 weeks speaking to students and informing them about the rules and regulations, we found that many students became much more informed and when asked again at a later date, could correctly define plagiarism in their own words. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that the campaign may have had an influence on the decrease in the number of suspected cases of plagiarism during that exam period. We are extremely keen to run this campaign again next year and it would be a great to do so in partnership with the University.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to work with the SU on the recommendations in regards to plagiarism from the last statement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to work with the Students' Union to provide information to students about unfair practice and plagiarism during exam weeks.
- The University to support the SU in seeking further feedback from students in regards to the specific issues that students face in regards to plagiarism.

Unfortunately, since the initial year, the SU has been receiving anecdotal evidence of this policy NOT BEING ADHERED TO in some schools

# WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS

In 2010-11, the Students' Union ran a campaign in order to lobby the University to free up Wednesday afternoon's from timetabled academic study to enable students to peruse extra and co-curricular activities to enhance their development whilst at University. This was a campaign in line with many other institutions and the University was keen to see it through, despite the numerous logistical challenges, mainly due to lack of rooms and in some cases lecture size. Despite these challenges, the University went ahead and committed to this change and implemented a policy of keeping Wednesday afternoons free from academic study from the 2011-12 academic year.

Unfortunately, since the initial year, the SU has been receiving anecdotal evidence of this policy not being adhered to in some schools. As a result, we ran an additional survey this year after complaints reached an all-time high from sports club members and course reps, that despite the formal reminders at University meetings from the SU, some lectures were still taking place on a Wednesday afternoon. Although sample size of this survey is low (64 respondents), this corresponds with the issues being raised through the SU Course Representative Council meeting throughout the year, in addition to the timetabled lectures that can be seen through the University's central online timetable system.

Of the 64 students surveyed, 61 respondents answered the question; "How regularly does this session take place on a Wednesday?" Worryingly over 50% of respondents answered 'regularly' and 38% of students responded 'every week.'

Whilst we can appreciate the fact that the University does not currently have enough space to timetable all of the lectures outside of Wednesday afternoons, whilst ensuring that there are a wide variety of modules in schools available for students to study, it is concerning at how quickly lectures have reappeared into student timetables despite the University policy.

64 STUDENTS SURVEYED  
**61 RESPONDENTS**

..... answered the question .....

“How regularly does this session take place on a Wednesday? ”

**50% 'REGULARLY'**  
**38% 'EVERY WEEK'**

In some cases, students have informed us as to the reason why their lecture is being scheduled during this time, therefore we were surprised to see that when asked "Have you been provided with an explanation as to why this session takes place on a Wednesday afternoon?" 77% of students answered stating that they had not been given an explanation. Of those that answered yes, they have been given an explanation; some of the responses were as follows;

- “Unable to timetable it elsewhere due to clashes ”
- “Too many students taking this module ”
- “Because that is the only day the company that take the practical can do”
- “Too many students to fit timetabled slots ”
- “The class needs to be small enough to fit everyone in ”
- “The lectures that we have on the Wednesday are catch up sessions, as our lecturer was on paternity leave during the first few weeks of the semester. ”
- “Time-tabling problems ”
- “A large group but others have had their lectures on Monday's or Fridays ”

Wednesday Afternoon SU Survey 2013-14

“Have you been provided with an explanation as to why this session takes place on a Wednesday afternoon? ”

**77%**  
OF STUDENTS GIVEN  
**NO EXPLANATION**

As the policy states 'free from academic study' we decided to seek clarity on what type of session is being taught on a Wednesday afternoon we asked student to identify if their class was a lecture, seminar, practical, (lab work, computer based etc) field trip (archaeological dig etc.) or other.

The results were as follows;

Was the Wednesday afternoon session a:	Response Percent	Response Count
Lecture	74.1%	43
Seminar	8.6%	5
Practical (lab work, computer based etc)	39.7%	23
Field Trip (archaeological Dig etc)	3.4%	2
Other (Please Specify)	-	7

“Does this session/module being scheduled on a Wednesday afternoon interrupt your co-curricular activities (Sports clubs, societies, Employability sessions)? ”

**87%**  
**YES**

We continued to delve further into the issue, asking those who answered the initial question, "does this session/module being scheduled on a Wednesday afternoon interrupt your co-curricular activities (Sports clubs, societies, Employability sessions)?" A resounding 87% of students responded with a 'yes'.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to promote its policy on keeping Wednesday afternoons free from academic study for all students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to issue an annual reminder to all staff, that Wednesday afternoons are to be kept free from academic study and compulsory lectures cannot be timetabled during this period.
- The University to work with schools and Students' Union to investigate the timetabled sessions currently on Wednesday afternoon, to see if alternative arrangements can be made for those schools who do not have the capacity to fulfil their curriculum without teaching in this period.

## GENERAL LACK OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN SCHOOLS

but more specifically in relation to **INEFFICIENT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS** for students on a **JOINT HONOURS COURSE**.

**ONE OF THE MOST COMMON ISSUES** in regards to communication concerns **students' MARKS** and this **information NOT BEING SHARED with the PERSONAL TUTOR** in the **JOINT SCHOOL**.

**FEEDBACK this year has also HIGHLIGHTED ISSUES SURROUNDING WELCOME WEEK COMMUNICATION, TIMETABLING CLASHES and ASSESSMENTS** – specifically in relation to **REFERENCING STYLES & EXPECTATIONS**.

Recently, the **SU** has worked with **students and staff in the COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES**, to arrange a **Joint-Honours staff-student event**, which provided a platform for students and staff to **discuss the issues** that joint honours students face and to **come up with a CHARTER** to try to alleviate some of the problems and **IMPROVE THE EXPERIENCE** for those students.

## SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE CHARTER ARE AS FOLLOWS;

- To avoid conflict between schools, the College will organise some College level events for Joint Honours students.
- The Students' Union and the College will work to develop a system of Joint Honours peer guides to support students studying between schools.
- All Joint Honours students will have a personal tutor in both schools.

# JOINT HONOURS & COMMUNICATION

Throughout the NSS data and in both SU annual surveys from 2012-13 and 2013-14, in addition to anecdotal evidence relayed via course reps during Course Representative Council, communication features quite heavily. There are numerous comments regarding a general lack of communication within schools but more specifically in relation to inefficient communication between departments for students who are studying on a joint honours course. One of the most common issues in regards to communication concerns students' marks and this information not being shared with the personal tutor in the joint school. In addition, feedback this year has also highlighted issues surrounding welcome week communication, timetabling clashes and assessments – specifically in relation to referencing styles and expectations.

Recently, the SU has worked with students and staff in the College of Arts and Humanities, to arrange a Joint-Honours staff-student event, which provided a platform for students and staff to discuss the issues that joint honours students face and to come up with a charter to try to alleviate some of the problems and improve the experience for those students. A draft version of the charter has just been sent from the SU to the College Manager and Dean for Arts and Humanities and we are very much looking forward to discussing some of the recommendations that came out of the day.

### Some examples from the charter are as follows;

- To avoid conflict between schools, the College will organise some College level events for Joint Honours students.
- The Students' Union and the College will work to develop a system of Joint Honours peer guides to support students studying between schools.
- All Joint Honours students will have a personal tutor in both schools.

From the event we noted that welcome week can be particularly challenging times for joint honours students, as their respective schools compete for their attention with often conflicting schedules, meaning that often students miss key information and bonding time with their peers. Whilst we recognise that it would be almost impossible to harmonise individual schools welcome week timetables to avoid conflicts, students and staff suggested having some key sessions (Library information, IT etc.) timetabled for joint honours students to ensure the most important sessions are not missed, as so students have time to meet their peers and do not end up feeling isolated during those first few weeks.

Furthermore, to support the flow of information we would like to see more joined up work between peer guides in supporting joint honours students, as well as recommending that joint honours students have, where possible, a peer guide who is a joint honours student themselves and understands the issues which may arise. We would like to work with the college and the central Peer Guide Co-ordinator to investigate how this could be realised.

It would be prudent to note that some of the systems indicated in the charter have also been trialled this year in the College of Arts and Humanities and we are looking forward to seeing these processes rolled out to the remaining colleges this coming academic year.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The College of Arts and Humanities to continue to work with the SU in developing the joint honours charter in order to further enhance the experience of joint honour students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to ensure that all joint honours students have a personal tutor in both schools, as per the charter, for the start of the academic year.
- Colleges to work with the SU to roll out joint honours events in order to highlight issues that students in their schools face and identify solutions and improvements for moving forward.
- Schools and the Peer Guide Co-ordinator to work with the Students' Union to investigate the feasibility of joint honour students receiving a joint honours peer guide to support them during the initial weeks of term.
- The University to work with schools and Students' Union to investigate the timetabled sessions currently on Wednesday afternoon, to see if alternative arrangements can be made for those schools who do not have the capacity to fulfil their curriculum without teaching in this period.

# SECTION TWO:

# INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

This section looks at how Bangor University can reduce barriers to participation in the curriculum and wider extra-curricular activities. It makes recommendations in order to ensure that every aspect of the student experience is inclusive of all students regardless of background, gender, sexuality or disability.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

LGBTQ+

DISABLED STUDENTS



# COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPING AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

BANGOR STUDENTS' UNION has been conducting some RESEARCH into how the LANGUAGE we use CREATES SOCIAL NORMS.

# INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

In 2011 Bangor University and Bangor Students' Union collaborated on the Student Experience Enhancement Strategy, which included a commitment to developing an inclusive community. The Strategy states;

From the acclaimed peer guide scheme, to the extensive support network of personal tutors, central services and halls wardens, Bangor University cares for and supports its students. We will strengthen our University community to ensure that all students have equal access to support services and are able to fully participate in the opportunities afforded by university life.

Bangor University's Student Experience Enhancement Strategy 2012-15

In addition, Bangor Students' Union has been conducting some research into how the language we use creates social norms. Recently our members voted to de-genderise our constitution, recognising that not everyone adheres to the gender binary of male or female, and that the use of terminology like "he/she" or "him/her" in official documentation can be both regressive and offensive. As such, we would recommend that the University also reviews its terminology both in terms of its written rules and regulations and also in terms of the delivery of its curriculum.

## Our members voted to DE-GENDERISE our constitution

We would RECOMMEND that the UNIVERSITY also REVIEWS its TERMINOLOGY both in terms of its WRITTEN RULES and REGULATIONS and also in terms of the DELIVERY OF ITS CURRICULUM.

My experience of being an LGBTQ+ student at Bangor University has been a positive experience.

56% AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED

## LGBTQ+

In 2014 the Students' Union collaborated with NUS on a national report titled 'Beyond the Straight and Narrow'. The Students' Union completed research with Bangor University students to better understand LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Queer/Questioning) students' experiences of Higher Education. Our conclusions were, generally, very positive with the following results:

- 56% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; "My experience of being an LGBTQ+ student at Bangor University has been a positive experience."
- 70% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I have felt comfortable in my learning environment."
- 55% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement; "Sometimes I feel as though I don't belong in my school."

However both the SU and NUS research uncovered many barriers that LGBTQ+ students face along their learning experience. This is not just specific to Bangor, in fact this is very much UK wide. The use of heteronormative language, the lack of LGB and T experiences and history reflected in the curriculum, participation in academic settings, and staff awareness of LGBT issues are some of the issues raised.

I have felt comfortable in my learning environment.

70% AGREED OR STRONGLY AGREED

55% DISAGREED OR STRONGLY DISAGREED  
Sometimes I feel as though I don't belong in my school.

A Equality Challenge Unit (2009) 'The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans staff and students in HE' indicates that students value lecturers being out in the classroom and, more specifically, the use of LGBT examples or materials - this is perceived as a sign of commitment to quality, and increased confidence in student participation in the learning environment.

I felt uncomfortable being with staff and students who I felt unable to out myself to, so I became introverted during more active learning (e.g. labs)

Comment from Bangor University student.

In welcome week there was a talk in my school... but it was all about straight peoples' relationships... which actually really annoyed and made me feel really uncomfortable. Not only had the LGBT been totally erased from the talk and research but also it simplified relationships down to women liking men's money and men liking women's physical appearance.

Comment from Bangor University student.

Both Bangor and NUS' research demonstrates that in terms of teaching and learning, the underlying problem is linked to insensitive curriculum content. Diversifying the curriculum has positive implications for students' confidence to speak up in class which affects attainment and overall engagement, including positively impacting upon LGBT student retention, which is far lower than heterosexual students. Furthermore, compassionate position regarding students' sexuality will not only improve students' academic experience in the classroom, but also prevents ignorant or offensive comments in both social and teaching spaces.

**DSA** is a **VITAL SUPPORT** for many **DISABLED STUDENTS**, helping many to **ACCESS EDUCATION**. Research has shown that **STUDENTS RECEIVING DSA** are **MORE LIKELY** to reach a **FIRST OR UPPER CLASS SECOND HONOURS** degree than disabled students who do not receive an allowance.

As **HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) in Wales** continues to **widen access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, CHANGES** to such a vital means of support could put **HE OUT OF REACH** for some **students with DISABILITIES**, or **severely impact** upon their **EXPERIENCES** and/or **ATTAINMENT** in University

The **SU WELCOMES** the move to **online Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs)**, **mitigating circumstances**, and **reasonable adjustments** to **MYBANGOR** as it is a **hugely important** step in **supporting** a range of students with **diverse needs**.

Evidence shows that **INCREASED INCLUSIVITY**, and **EQUALITY**, **CONTRIBUTE** to **RETENTION** and **ATTAINMENT**

# DISABLED STUDENTS

Recently the UK Government released a statement announcing a review into the Disabled Students' Allowance. DSA is a vital support for many disabled students, helping many to access education. Research has shown that students receiving DSA are more likely to reach a first or upper class second honours degree than disabled students who do not receive an allowance.

Students have expressed concern about the possible changes that may be made as a result of the review, and the SU would like to echo these concerns. As higher education (HE) in Wales continues to widen access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, changes to such a vital means of support could put HE out of reach for some students with disabilities, or severely impact upon their experiences and/or attainment in University if steps are not taken to militate against any negative changes.

However, at Bangor, it should be noted that the SU welcomes the move to online Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs), mitigating circumstances, and reasonable adjustments to myBangor as it is a hugely important step in supporting a range of students with diverse needs. We are extremely pleased to see the University pushing forward with this agenda, along with its commitment to develop an inclusive course monitoring guide for disabled students.

It is clear that Bangor University is committed to supporting a wide range of students throughout their time at Bangor, and breaking down barriers before they occur. Evidence shows that increased inclusivity, and equality, contribute to retention and attainment, and the University should be applauded for its continuing commitment to enhance our inclusive community.

“ I am a heavily dyslexic individual, and I really struggle with written work. Had I not been provided with the hardware support I would not have survived University. ”

Comment from Bangor University student.

“ The consequence of the new proposals would put me at a disadvantage! I would not be able to afford the equipment I need to help me be on an equal footing with my peers and would mean special arrangements would have to be put in place making me stand out as being different rather than independent and self-sufficient which the current proposed DSA support will enable for me. Also importantly without the DSA support I would not gain the independent skills I need to manage my condition in the work place after university. ”

Comment from Bangor University student.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to support the delivery of an inclusive curriculum for LGBTQ+ and disabled students.

The University to ensure the successful migration of Personal Learning Support Plans (PLSPs), mitigating circumstances, and reasonable adjustments to myBangor.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to work with the Students' Union to implement recommendations in Bangor Students' Union's LGBT in HE report and NUS' On the Straight and Narrow report.
- The University to produce a strategy for dealing with any reforms to DSA to ensure that the impact on Bangor University students is minimal, once clarity has been disclosed as a result of UK Government changes.
- The University to work with the Students' Union to create course guidelines relevant to disabled, LGBTQ+ and international students, which reflects on gender in the curriculum.
- The University to de-genderise its rules, regulations and procedures in order to remove any hetro-normative language.

# SECTION THREE:

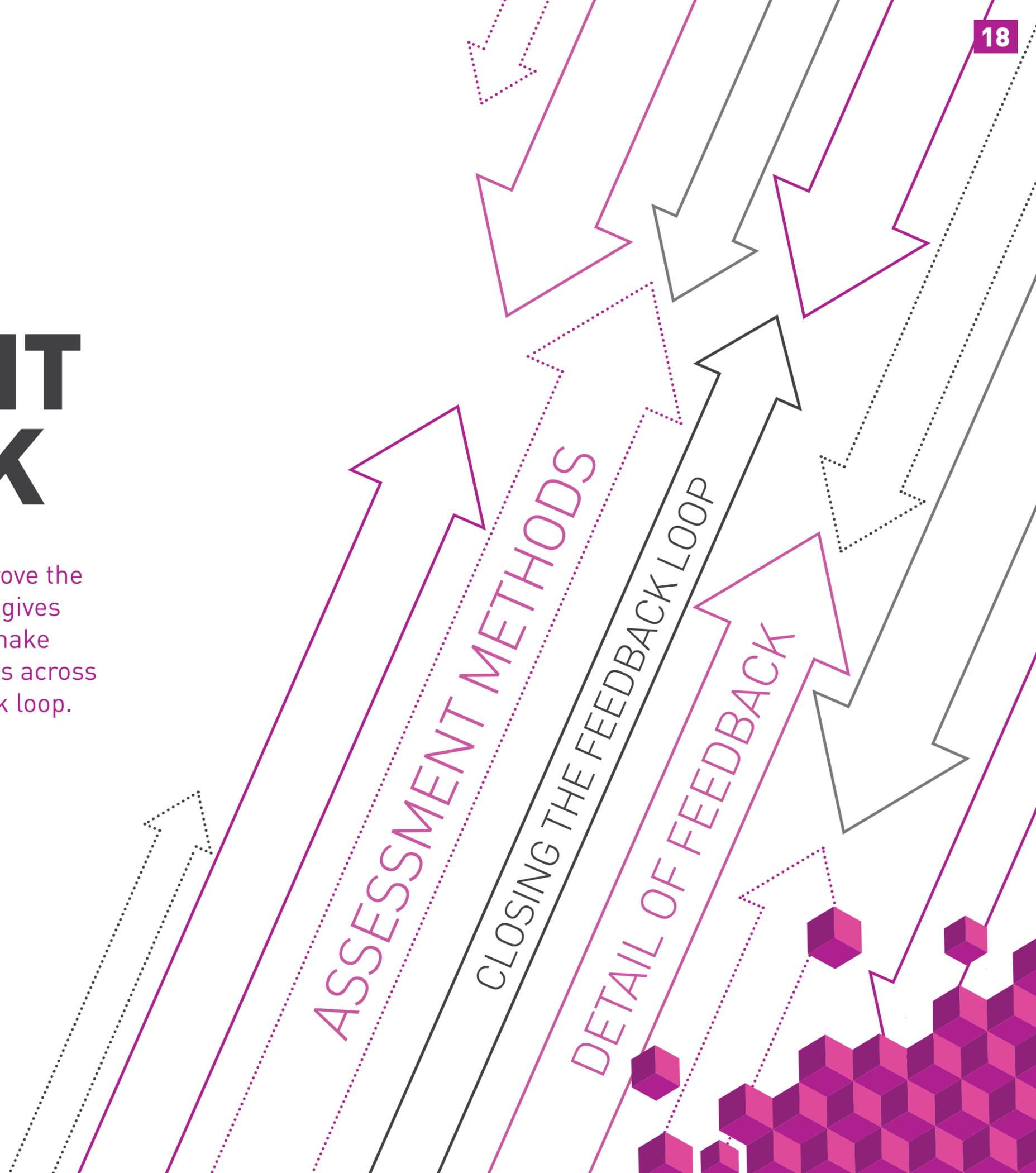
# ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

This section looks at how the institution can improve the academic experience through the way in which it gives feedback to students on their assessments. We make recommendations in order to create consistencies across schools and that schools are closing the feedback loop.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

DETAIL OF FEEDBACK



This year **BANGOR UNIVERSITY'S OVERALL SATISFACTION** for **ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK GREW** by **5%** from **68%** to **73%**

Many students have commented on the **value of staff having REGULAR OFFICE HOURS** to allow students to have **FACE TO FACE CONTACT** to **DISCUSS FEEDBACK CONCERNS**

# ASSESSMENT METHODS

In our last statement, we noted that satisfaction scores for assessment and feedback nationally, were considerably lower than in any other category of the National Student Survey. However, this year Bangor University's overall satisfaction for assessment and feedback grew by 5% from 68% to 73%. This now places student satisfaction with assessment and feedback as being 2% higher overall than it was in 2011. Although it is positive to see this score increase by 5% in one year, it could be said to be concerning that since 2011, overall satisfaction for assessment and feedback has only grown by 2%. The University has invested in this area however; there is one section of the survey that is clearly bringing the overall satisfaction figure down.

This year, feedback we have received from students has varied in this category, ranging from issues such as failure to adhere to 4 week feedback deadline and issues relating to detail of feedback. It appears that these inconsistencies are not always across colleges, but often occur within schools and from module to module. Many students have commented on the value of staff having regular office hours to allow students to have face to face contact to discuss feedback concerns but again this varies as not all school consistently provide this service.

# CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

In the 2012-13 academic year research had shown that students were not happy with the promptness of the feedback they received on their work. NSS satisfaction was significantly low in this section at 61% and focus group data had confirmed that this was an issue that varied across and sometimes even within schools. As a result we recommended that;

“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.”

**Bangor Students' Union's Annual Student Statement 2012-13**

This recommendation was to ensure that all students knew when to expect their work returned with feedback and therefore we expected as a result, 'prompt feedback' would become less subjective and more evaluative. Despite this recommendation not being made to the University until after the publication of the 2012-13 NSS result, it is extremely encouraging to see that this score increased to 70% (9% higher than the previous year.) The University have not made any legislative changes in order to ensure that schools are adhering to this recommendation, however the approach by the Pro Vice Chancellor's office has been that emphasis should be put on schools 'owning' the recommendations for a more effective and joined up approach. A commitment has been made by the institution to ensure that this area is evaluated and positive action taken if the result is not as expected. The Students' Union looks forward to investigating the impact of this recommendation in the 2013-14 NSS and through our 2014-15 annual survey.

Feedback from 'Our Manifesto' and the open **comments on the NSS** support the opinion that students in **MANY SCHOOLS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THE FEEDBACK THAT THEY RECEIVE**, with some commenting that not only is the level of feedback they receive **not always detailed enough**, some feel that course **feedback isn't taken seriously** by their school. **One comment states;**

“Feedback given to staff over the course of my three years here haven't been actioned in any way.”

NSS 2012-13 open comment

There is, however some example of student being extremely satisfied with the level of feedback they receive but the issue sometimes is the **LACK OF AWARENESS OF THE AVAILABILITY OF OBTAINING THIS FEEDBACK ISN'T ALWAYS CLEAR**. The SU is aware that **students can collect their work from school administrators or collection boxes BUT OFTEN AT THE END OF THE YEAR MUCH OF THIS WORK IS STILL UNCLAIMED**.

# DETAIL OF FEEDBACK

In the 2012-13 NSS, student satisfaction scored quite low at 64% on the question "Feedback on my work has helped me to clarify things that I did not understand." This is concerning as it also relates to the level of detailed feedback that students receive, (which scored 70% in satisfaction in the same year.) This highlights the fact that more work needs to be done in this area and that maybe current methods, in some schools are not working as effectively as they could be. Feedback from 'Our Manifesto' and the open comments on the NSS support the opinion that students in many schools are dissatisfied with the feedback that they receive, with some commenting that not only is the level of feedback they receive not always detailed enough, some feel that course feedback isn't taken seriously by their school. **One comment states;**

“Feedback given to staff over the course of my three years here haven't been actioned in any way.”

NSS 2012-13 open comment

This also relates to comments in 'Our Manifesto' survey regarding course reps, with some students commenting that they feel points raised in student-staff liaison committees are not acted upon. There is, however some example of student being extremely satisfied with the level of feedback they receive but the issue sometimes is the lack of awareness of the availability of obtaining this feedback isn't always clear. The SU is aware that students can collect their work from school administrators or collection boxes but often at the end of the year much of this work is still unclaimed.

In addition, the University is trying to ensure that the standard of assessment and feedback remains high, with various action plans being produced, both as part of the NSS action plan days which is an opportunity for staff and students to discuss ideas and create join plans to work on throughout the year. We have also been informed about innovative methods such as using new materials to convey course feedback (e.g video screens) and regular e-mail/blackboard updates. Academic feedback has also been commented on, with all schools committing to improve various factors, such as turnaround of marking and use of differing methods to engage students in feedback to name but a few.

## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to work with the Students' Union in maintaining an open dialogue of student's experiences in regards to feedback.

The University to continue to work with schools to ensure that the 4 week deadline for returning students' work is publicised and met by all schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to work with the SU to publicise the importance of students collecting their feedback.
- Schools to consistently utilise services such as blackboard, myBangor, email etc to publicise when assessment have been marked and are available to collect.
- The University to work with schools to ensure that they are providing 'office hours' or similar for students to arrange face to face contact time with staff to obtain and/or discuss their feedback.

# SECTION FOUR:

# WELSH MEDIUM PROVISION

This section looks at the experiences of welsh speaking students and the impact of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. We make recommendations around ensuring a strong Welsh community and a diversity of Welsh medium provision at Bangor University.

In our **2012-13** Statement we commended the University for its **COMMITMENT** to the provision of **WELSH MEDIUM EDUCATION** and access to services and communications through students' language of their choice. **Bangor University is the LARGEST provider in Wales for provision of WELSH MEDIUM EDUCATION.**

ACCESS TO SERVICES/ COMMUNICATION

WELSH MODULE CHOICE

COLEG CYMRAEG CENEDLAETHOL

The **Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol** provides students across **WALES** with financial support for completing all or part of their course through the medium of **WELSH**, and also provides a growing network of Welsh medium provision across Higher Education Institutions in Wales.

Whilst we welcome the development of the Coleg we do however have anecdotal evidence from staff and students with regards to **module choice, specialist subject areas, quality** and the **WELSH language community within schools**.

## COLEG CYMRAEG CENEDLAETHOL

The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol provides students across Wales with financial support for completing all or part of their course through the medium of Welsh, and also provides a growing network of Welsh medium provision across Higher Education Institutions in Wales. We welcome this development, particularly as the financial support from HEFCW, the Welsh Medium Premium, was withdrawn in 2012/13 at a sum of £1m for the sector.

Whilst we welcome the development of the Coleg we do however have anecdotal evidence from staff and students with regards to module choice, specialist subject areas, quality and the Welsh language community within schools.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that specialist subjects within schools have been lost due to the new arrangements as a result of the Coleg's lectureships, and that some are opting not to study through the medium of Welsh due to the smaller number of staff teaching through the medium of Welsh. This has also had an impact on the variety of modules available to students.

Having engaged with staff and students on this issue, concerns with regards to distance learning and the quality of the learning experience were raised. Some new Coleg Cymraeg modules, which have replaced BU modules, are being taught through video link, which many students both struggle to engage with and struggle to access additional support where necessary.

Students who participated in research work completed by Canolfan Bedwyr agreed that a strong Welsh community is important when studying through the medium of Welsh and that this exists at Bangor.

When asked **whether there was SUFFICIENT INFORMATION available to students about WELSH MEDIUM MODULES**, whilst **15 students agreed or strongly agreed, 11 disagreed or strongly disagreed**.

When asked to respond to the statement

◀ **THERE IS NOT ENOUGH RESOURCES TO STUDY THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WELSH** ▶▶

, the response overall, was **low, scoring 6**

## WELSH MODULE CHOICE

It is important to note the varying data analysis styles used in this section. The data received from Canolfan Bedwyr is analysed on the basis of 'value' rather than average percentages, as with our data. This value ranges on a scale from -56 to +56. We have used the same principle as Canolfan Bedwyr in this section in order to ensure that the data is treated in the same way.

This year we have engaged with Canolfan Bedwyr's BEA Internship project which looked at why students opted to study through the medium of Welsh. At a time when HEFCW funding for Welsh medium education has been removed, and the Coleg Cymraeg is increasing funding and opportunities for students, it's vital that Welsh medium education continues to be readily available to students and that students' needs and expectations are met with regards to Welsh medium provision.

When asked whether there was sufficient information available to students about Welsh medium modules, whilst 15 students agreed or strongly agreed, 11 disagreed or strongly disagreed. This gave an overall score of 5 for the following statement; 'There was sufficient information available about Welsh Medium Modules'. This raises concern when a score of 13 (16 students strongly agree or agree, and 8 students disagree or strongly disagree) was given to the following statement; 'The choice of Welsh medium modules was important to me when choosing my University'. There clearly exists a gap between students' expectations and reality of Welsh medium modules at Bangor.

**Students' experiences of studying 40 credits or more through the medium of Welsh were mixed.**

Furthermore, when asked if **students submit work through the medium of Welsh for English taught modules**.

Students **'strongly disagreed'** or **'disagreed'** with the statement.

Students' experiences of studying 40 credits or more through the medium of Welsh were mixed.

When asked to respond to the statement "There is not enough resources to study through the medium of Welsh", the response overall, was low, scoring 6. Further investigation shows that this is linked, in many subjects, to the lack of Welsh terminological resources available at the University. This has a real impact on students' confidence to study and submit work through the medium of Welsh.

Furthermore, when asked if students submit work through the medium of Welsh for English taught modules. Students 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the statement. From the data we collect, we know that the ability to study in the language of their choice and access services in the language of their choice is extremely important to students. It is therefore concerning that very few Welsh speaking students would feel comfortable submitting work in Welsh for English medium modules. A focus group following the initial survey found that one of the main reasons for students not doing this is due to a concern regarding translation of their work and the potential for errors to occur through this process, resulting in the original message being lost and as a result, the student is awarded less marks.

In the survey, students' response to the opportunities to develop language skills was particularly low. "I have had sufficient opportunities to develop my language skills" scored 7. Further research told us that students, who opt not to undertake Glowyi Iaithe modules due to module choices, are not provided with opportunities to undertake similar development.

Overall, satisfaction with the provision of Welsh medium education and services continues to be high and investment into this provision is clearly demonstrated as a priority.

In the last academic year, **1416 FULL TIME REGISTERED STUDENTS WERE STUDYING THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WELSH** for all or part of their course. This figure equates to **12.47%** of the **STUDENT POPULATION** at Bangor.

In **2012-13**, **79.4%** of students told us that they were aware that they were **ABLE TO SUBMIT ASSIGNMENTS IN EITHER LANGUAGE**, in comparison to **83.4%** of students who answered **YES THIS ACADEMIC YEAR**.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES/ COMMUNICATION

In the last academic year, 1416 full time registered students were studying through the medium of Welsh for all or part of their course. This figure equates to 12.47% of the student population at Bangor. As this is such a high percentage of students studying through the Welsh language, it is important to ensure that their student experience is comparable to that of the rest of the student population. As a result, in our annual survey we asked the following questions;

- **Do the University communicate with you in the language of your choice?**
- **Are you aware that you are able to submit assignments in either language?**
- **Have you ever been unable to access a service in the language of your choice?**
- **Are you able to access your exam papers in the language of your choice?**

Responses to these questions in Our Manifesto were extremely positive, and we are pleased to see the University continuing to deliver on students' needs and expectations of Welsh medium education and services at the University.

In response to the question "Do the University communicate with you in the language of your choice?" 97.5% of respondents answered 'Yes'. In response to "Have you ever been unable to access a service in the language of your choice?" 90% of students stated 'No', which is an increase on last year's response. The ability to access services in the language of students' choice is especially important for students accessing support and guidance. It is encouraging to see that year on year student satisfaction in this area is continually high.

Bangor University's reputation for the provision of Welsh medium education is clear to prospective students across Wales, and therefore the ability to submit assignments in Welsh or English on Welsh or English courses is of importance.

In 2012-13, 79.4% of students told us that they were aware that they were able to submit assignments in either language, in comparison to 83.4% of students who answered yes this academic year. However, this year we have received anecdotal evidence of examination papers through the medium of Welsh not being readily available to students. Whilst 95% of respondents told us that they have been able to access examination papers through the medium of Welsh, there has been an increase of students coming forward having not been aware of this procedure, or in some cases, having been unable to access an exam in Welsh. Whilst it is clear that Bangor University is committed to providing education and services through the medium of Welsh, more could be done to promote the availability of academic bilingual services and resources.

Whilst **95%** of respondents told us that they **have been able to access examination papers through the medium of Welsh**, there has been an increase of students coming forward having not been aware of this procedure, or in some cases, having been **unable to access an exam in Welsh**.

In response to the question

◀◀ **DO THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATE WITH YOU IN THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR CHOICE?** ▶▶

**97.5%** of respondents answered **'Yes'**.

### COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to ensure the presence of a strong Welsh community at Bangor working positively alongside UMCB in further expanding the opportunities for Welsh students.

The University to ensure continuous development of Welsh medium provision, through working with Canolfan Bedwyr, UMCB, and the SU to monitor students' needs when studying through the medium of Welsh.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Schools to work closely with Canolfan Bedwyr to improve the availability and clarity of information on Welsh medium modules at Bangor University.**
- **The University to investigate the feasibility of providing Welsh medium seminars to accompany modules only taught through the medium of English if there is demand.**
- **The University to continue to investigate the impact the Coleg Cymraeg has had on the availability of Welsh medium modules.**
- **The University to work with the SU to evaluate the process for students submitting their work to be translated and review the promotion of this service to Welsh speaking students.**

# SECTION FIVE: EMPLOYABILITY

This section looks at the institutions approach to employability and how this is embedded into the curriculum. The recommendations feature around the Bangor Employability Award and how it can be further promoted to students.

PROMOTION OF THE BANGOR  
EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

PARITY OF INFORMATION ACROSS SCHOOLS

UPTAKE AND STUDENT PERCEPTION

In 2012 Bangor University launched the **Bangor Employability Award (BEA)** to all undergraduate students following a 2 year trial in a few schools across the institution. **The University has invested heavily in the scheme** and has worked hard to ensure its promotion to students.

However, **feedback from Course Representative Council suggested that student opinion surrounding the BEA is mixed** – with many students expressing ongoing concerns in regards to the **LACK of INFORMATION and COMMUNICATION about the BEA Hub, a lack of CLARITY in regards to the purpose of the award and the complexity of the scheme.**

## PROMOTION OF THE BANGOR EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

In 2012 Bangor University launched the Bangor Employability Award (BEA) to all undergraduate students following a 2 year trial in a few schools across the institution. The University has invested heavily in the scheme and has worked hard to ensure its promotion to students. In fact, over the last 2 years the SU has been in regular contact with the BEA, including inviting the team to Course Rep Council meetings to listen to student feedback and as a result of said feedback, worked with us to run focus groups in order to further explore some of the issues raised. We are pleased to note that the BEA team have been extremely keen to work with us on the issues raised at course pre council and in the focus groups, something that has been appreciated by both the SU and course representatives.

However, feedback from Course Representative Council suggested that student opinion surrounding the BEA is mixed – with many students expressing ongoing concerns in regards to the lack of information and communication about the BEA Hub, a lack of clarity in regards to the purpose of the award and the complexity of the scheme. Many course reps reiterated the point that students do know about the award but very few understand how to begin completing the scheme. Due to this information, in 'Our Manifesto 2014' students were specifically surveyed about the BEA. The survey supported the views of course reps in terms of awareness, with around 90% of respondents stating 'yes' to the question "Are you aware of the Bangor Employability Award scheme?" However, worryingly, the majority of responses (65%) indicated they are not actively participating in the BEA scheme, or planning to complete the award before graduation, despite institution wide efforts to promote and encourage participation. Although this is in line with their target of 30% engagement (agreed with HEFCW and the University) we would still like to see an increase in the number of students participating in the scheme.

**'Our Manifesto 2014' students were specifically surveyed about the BEA.** The survey supported the views of course reps in terms of awareness, with around **90% of respondents stating 'yes' to the question "Are you aware of the Bangor Employability Award scheme?"** However, worryingly, the majority of responses (65%) indicated they are **not actively participating in the BEA scheme, or planning to complete the award before graduation**, despite institution wide efforts to promote and encourage participation.

Furthermore, this data is supported by additional comments from students regarding the scheme, as detailed below.

- ▀ **I have already finished BEA 200 but don't really know why I'm taking part as it seems kind of pointless.**
- ▀ **I am aware of it, and I have seen it mentioned at a couple of events, but I do not really know much about it, who it is applicable to, what the accreditation value of it really is. I think it sounds like a good idea to structure how students get experience, but I do not know much about it.**
- ▀ **I am totally confident I would secure employment over someone with just the certificate, because I have been in the working world, dealt with real people and money.**
- ▀ **Employers are more interested in any relevant practical experience, not just another piece of paper that says you got an award.**

### Our Manifesto 2013-14

Although it would also be fair to say that students are generally supportive of a University-wide scheme that encourages the opportunity for students to think about their employability, and awareness of the scheme in general is high, more could be done centrally and at a school level to ensure that the aims and purpose of the scheme and the reasons for completing the Award are promoted to students.

It appears that there is **INCONSISTENCY in the way schools are PROMOTING and EXPLAINING the BEA** and this is **impacting on student opinion and attitude towards the initiative.**

The scheme is **often MISREPRESENTED by staff**, with an **emphasis on obtaining 'XP' the schemes points system, over the self-reflection and personal growth aspects.** Furthermore, as **students LACK the knowledge of who the BEA contact is in their school**, they are **UNABLE to discuss or ask for guidance**, which may be **discouraging for students.**

## PARITY OF INFORMATION ACROSS SCHOOLS

Analysis of the survey results on a school level also highlighted some discrepancies regarding attitudes and motivation to complete the award. It appears that there is inconsistency in the way schools are promoting and explaining the BEA and this is impacting on student opinion and attitude towards the initiative.

This year, we decided to hold a focus group to gain more detailed information from course representatives in various schools. Whilst the focus group recognised positives within the scheme, such as, a large degree of flexibility and the inclusion of a variety of eligible activities, a number of fundamental issues were stressed. Communication issues were raised by the participants of the focus group as being one of the most fundamental problems of the scheme. There is a severe lack of communication from the individual schools towards the students regarding the BEA, how it is run and organised and who the relevant contacts are within each school. Students are unaware of the existence of BEA school contacts in some cases.

**COMMUNICATION issues** were raised by the participants of the focus group as being one of the **most fundamental problems of the scheme.**

As the BEA scheme relies on schools to administer the scheme effectively, this bottleneck is detrimental to the scheme's success and to the students who could be benefitted. Commentary highlighted how many schools do not commit to following through in terms of providing information about the scheme, after a short introductory lecture/session focused on the award. The scheme is often misrepresented by staff, with an emphasis on obtaining 'XP' the schemes points system, over the self-reflection and personal growth aspects. Furthermore, as students lack the knowledge of who the BEA contact is in their school, they are unable to discuss or ask for guidance, which may be discouraging for students.

Another area in which students praised but emphasised a lack of awareness about information was in relation to the BEA Internship scheme for undergraduates. When discussed at the focus group, students either did not know about the scheme, or heard about it but did not associate it with the Employability Award. Generally, students showed a positive interest in the initiative but recommended that more advertising and promotion of the opportunities might engage students more with the specific internships and also with the scheme in general.

When surveyed as to **why students did not attend session provided by the BEA team**, feedback such as **'scheduling issues'**, **'reading the e-mail too late'** and **'lecture clashes'** were highlighted as reasons why students did not attend.

One of the **BIGGEST student perceptions** was regarding the **time that it took in order to take part in the scheme** and the **CONFUSION surrounding the process of 'getting started'**

Both **students and staff** have informally **raised the issue** with us **in relation to the LENGTH OF TIME it takes/can take to input achievements and activities into the award system**, and often the **process of doing so can be quite CONFUSING**.

**Course representatives** in the focus group **recommended a tighter COHESION of the BEA scheme with students' degree programmes**. They noted that as part of this tighter cohesion, **'graduate attributes' (descriptors of skills etc. used within the BEA scheme) could be applied to module descriptions**, to provide students with a guide as to **what SKILLS could be GAINED in the relevant module**.

## UPTAKE AND STUDENT PERCEPTION

When surveyed as to why students did not attend session provided by the BEA team, feedback such as **'scheduling issues'**, **'reading the e-mail too late'** and **'lecture clashes'** were highlighted as reasons why students did not attend. In addition, a few comments related to a lack of relevance to the degree that they were studying or lack of consideration of the importance of the talk/event were also raised.

One suggestion from students attending the focus group was to use the calendar function provided through office 365, so student can be invited to 'core' talks through the system and can accept or decline invitations as they read the e-mail. We have found that this system tends to increase student participation in other areas, for example Course Representative Council and can easily be applied through the flexible I.T system; it would also make timetabling easier for students, as any events would appear on their Outlook calendars.

One of the biggest student perceptions was regarding the time that it took in order to take part in the scheme and the confusion surrounding the process of 'getting started'. Many students raised this issue through Course Rep Council and during the focus group, some having experienced it under the only method during the trial period and had been put off, whilst others had heard through friends and not been able to seek clarity on the current procedure for themselves, had chosen not to engage. Both students and staff have informally raised the issue with us in relation to the length of time it takes/can take to input achievements and activities into the award system, and often the process of doing so can be quite confusing. Students in the focus group commented that this could also be a factor in students not wanting to currently complete the award.

The final issue raised, both throughout 'Our Manifesto' and by course reps, (at course Rep Council and the focus group) was the relevancy of the scheme, both to students and employers. Course representatives in the focus group recommended a tighter cohesion of the BEA scheme with students' degree programmes. They noted that as part of this tighter cohesion, 'graduate attributes' (descriptors of skills etc. used within the BEA scheme) could be applied to module descriptions, to provide students with a guide as to what skills could be gained in the relevant module. This could aid module choices in a way that allows students to steer their degree towards a more relevant path for their desired career. A focus on employability within the curriculum could make students more aware of the scheme's purposes and would also encourage students to actively participate.

Finally, it is worth noting that as part of the focus group we held a discussion around the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) to gain a greater insight into what information student had about the document and what their understanding about it was. Every student we spoke to did not know what the HEAR was, how it would be used and when it would be implemented. Although it will not be relevant for every current student, it is worth noting that students should be aware of the record and how it is beneficial for them to engage in employability enhancing activities, both in order to further themselves and due to the emphasis that is being placed on these skills as part of the HEAR.

**Every student we spoke to did NOT know what the HEAR was, HOW it would be used and WHEN it would be implemented**

### COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to invest in employability by provide internship opportunities for students through the Bangor Employability Award.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University to work with the Students' Union and course representatives to review the BEA scheme to ensure that it is relevant, accessible and user-led, as a result of student feedback and in light of the developments with the HEAR.
- The University to ensure that all employability staff contact details are displayed on myBangor to ensure all students know who they can contact in their school for relevant BEA information.
- The BEA team to work with schools to ensure that a consistent message in regards to the purpose of the scheme, including subject specific information, is communicated clearly to students by their respective schools.
- The University to incorporate graduate attributes into module descriptors to provide students with a better understanding of the relevance of employability and the BEA as part of their degree.
- The University to work with the SU to ensure promotion and understanding of the relevance of HEAR

# SECTION SIX:

# THE POSTGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

The section looks at the experiences of postgraduate students, particularly around teaching and representation. We make recommendations to ensure that postgraduates can progress through continuous personal development, but are also supported in their teaching roles.

POSTGRADUATES WHO TEACH

POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATION

In the **2013 PTES** survey Bangor, overall, scored well against sector averages.

**Overall satisfaction was 71%, 2% ABOVE the sector average.**

Students used word such as **'ENTHUSIASTIC'**, **'INCREDIBLE'**, and **'SUPPORTIVE'** to describe their experience at Bangor.

It is, however worth noting that when it came to **learning resources**, Bangor scored **74% which was 4% BELOW the sector average.**

It was positive to see Bangor, once again, increase its score on feedback.

**Feedback scored 1% HIGHER than the sector average, with Bangor at 69%.**

Generally, the **postgraduate academic experience at Bangor is positive**, and students are often provided with **opportunities to develop personally and professionally** alongside academic study.

Only **37% of students rated teaching quality on their programme of study as consistently good**, and despite **teaching and learning receiving an overall score of 80%, 4% ABOVE the sector average**, responses for **Depth of Learning** were **somewhat concerning.**

It was also positive to see Bangor score **5% above the sector for dissertation/major projects, scoring an overall 78%.**

**Less than 25% of postgraduate students thought that a Course Representative was their representative**, and **60%** were **unsure of their departmental representation. Almost 70% of NUS respondents claimed** that there was **no representation** or they were **UNAWARE of who their departmental representative is.**

## POSTGRADUATE REPRESENTATION

In the 2013 PTES survey Bangor, overall, scored well against sector averages. Overall satisfaction was 71%, 2% above the sector average. Students used word such as 'Enthusiastic', 'Incredible', and 'Supportive' to describe their experience at Bangor. There was however some concerning results. Only 37% of students rated teaching quality on their programme of study as consistently good, and despite teaching and learning receiving an overall score of 80%, 4% above the sector average, responses for Depth of Learning were somewhat concerning, and we refer to the University's comments on this matter;

"Although BU as a whole was only slightly below the sector average, students of some schools felt that they had not been given sufficient opportunity to:

- **Analyse ideas or examine a particular case or situation in depth**
- **Synthesise information or organise ideas or experiences into more complex relationships**
- **Judge and evaluate information, arguments, or methods**

**Again, for every low-scoring school in any particular college, there is another school that scores highly, suggesting that the colleges might be an appropriate organisational level to address shortcomings."**

It is, however worth noting that when it came to learning resources, Bangor scored 74% which was 4% below the sector average. This may be resolved when the University defines and adopts the minimum standards of blackboard paper that IT and the SU has been working on this year, as per the recommendation in the last statement, however it would still be prudent for the University to investigate this issue further.

It was positive to see Bangor, once again, increase its score on feedback. Feedback scored 1% higher than the sector average, with Bangor at 69%. However the negative comments that featured in the survey were related to the quality and timing of feedback and deadline clashes, comments which often feature in NSS results and derives from Course Representatives. It was also positive to see Bangor score 5% above the sector for dissertation/major projects, scoring an overall 78%.

Postgraduate communities and representation are extremely important in ensuring that Bangor University continues to improve the postgraduate student experience at the same level of the undergraduate student experience.

In recent years both representation and the postgraduate community have diminished at Bangor, which has been evident in Postgraduate Student Forum (now Postgraduate Society) and Students' Union consultation. Less than 25% of postgraduate students thought that a Course Representative was their representative, and 60% were unsure of their departmental representation. Almost 70% of NUS respondents claimed that there was no representation or they were unaware of who their departmental representative is. We find this extremely concerning, not only when postgraduates are undertaking teaching responsibilities, but that postgraduates feel that they are unrepresented within the University.

Generally, the postgraduate academic experience at Bangor is positive, and students are often provided with opportunities to develop personally and professionally alongside academic study, which is considered important for many of our students. It is also clear that the University is committed to further improving the experience of postgraduates and we are looking forward to being involved in how this learning experience evolves.

Whilst we are **pleased to see the University introducing a CODE OF PRACTICE for Postgraduates who teach**, we do have some **concerns regarding the contract of employment for those postgraduates** and the **disparity across schools** on what is defined as **professional development and how this differs from employment**.

# POSTGRADUATES WHO TEACH

Postgraduates who are involved with teaching are key in developing new teaching methods, engaging students in new and innovative ways of teaching, and often provide additional support for students where necessary. Whilst we are pleased to see the University introducing a Code of Practice for Postgraduates who teach, we do have some concerns regarding the contract of employment for those postgraduates and the disparity across schools on what is defined as professional development and how this differs from employment.

As part of the University's consultation on the Code of Practice, the Students' Union found that students' main motivations for teaching were for experience and gaining skills, which 71% of respondents and 53% of respondents agreed with respectively. The overwhelming majority told us that they had not received any formal induction or training, which raises concerns over the quality of teaching, students' confidence in teaching, and students' professional development.

In addition, the findings linked to employment were also particularly concerning. Whilst many students reported having ample opportunity to undertake teaching at Bangor University, through both SU and NUS research we found that postgraduates overwhelmingly reported not receiving an employment contract, job description, and when payment was given, it was often below minimum wage. As a result of this research we gave the following response to the University;

“**The 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.**”

Eager to find out more about the national view on this issue, we consulted with NUS who said that institutions generally follow informal procedures for employing postgraduates as casual and part-time teaching staff. 35% of NUS respondents and 68% of BU respondents reported not receiving a contract. Furthermore, NUS research found that 43% of respondents felt that their pay was either unfair or grossly unfair. Whilst this is an issue facing many Universities across the UK, the Students' Union would like to see postgraduates who teach fully supported by the institution.

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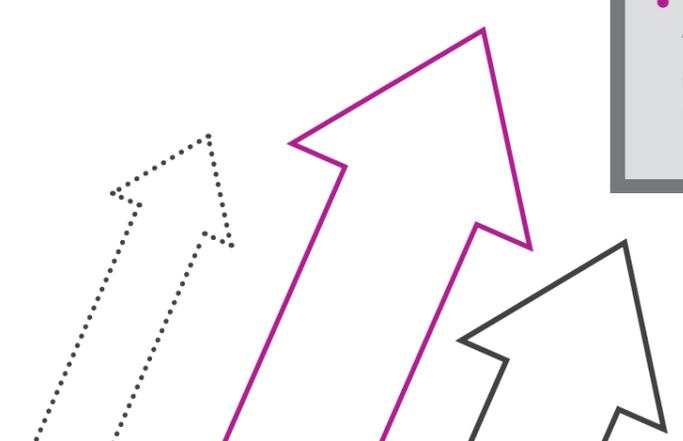
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## COMMENDATIONS:

The University to continue to invest in promoting and enhancing the Postgraduate experience through initiatives similar to that of postgraduate tutors and postgraduate induction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The University, Students' Union, and UCU to work collaboratively to develop postgraduate representation and improve awareness of SU representation, and Staff Union representation amongst postgraduate students.
- The Students' Union and University to work with the Postgraduate Students' Society to develop training for those who teach, that meets both student's and the institution's needs.
- The University to work with the SU and UCU to gather postgraduate student feedback on teaching and employment to better understand the landscape at Bangor.



# ANNUAL STUDENT STATEMENT 2013-14 CONCLUSION:

Bangor University has invested dramatically in the student experience over the last few years. It has committed to funding important roles, both within the institution and the Students' Union, such as the Course Representative Co-ordinator, the Student Engagement Project Officer, the Pro Vice Chancellor for Students and the Director of Student Experience. All these roles are working extremely well across the University and academic schools are consistently engaging with other staff and their students in order to improve the learning environment. Although it is clear that there are still some areas of concern, both from the SU and the student population, it is also fair to say that the University is supportive and does maintain an open dialogue with the Union and its students.

Recently, the University has committed to funding a Students' Union Academic Researcher as part of the fee plan in order to investigate the student experience further and this role will also help support the Union in our research for this statement and the implementation of the recommendations. Furthermore, the 24 hour library has proved to be a great success, the one year trial is over, and the SU has had the opportunity to feed extensively into the evaluation of the pilot year and is extremely positive about the plans moving forward. It is fantastic to see initiatives such as 'Student Library Champions' and 'School Directors of Student Engagement' being discussed and the University's Teaching and Learning Committee and we are looking forward to see how each of these roles will be implemented during the next academic year. In addition, we are also extremely excited to see

how the student submissions to the internal quality audit and revalidation panels will be received next year, after a successful partnership approach in both the schools of Modern Languages and Chemistry this year. Increasingly, the NSS action plan days, in which both staff and students join together to discuss and develop the areas featured in the National Student Survey are growing from strength to strength and we are excited to see these discussions develop further through being items on the Student-Staff Liaison Committee's. Bangor University has definitely taken on board the recommendations from last year's submission in regards to partnership and strengthening its relationship with students on all levels and we are confident in the belief that the experiences of students studying at Bangor University are only going to get better.

