

Student Submission 2014

Cardiff University Students' Union
Undeb Myfyrwyr Prifysgol Caerdydd



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Student Written Submission 2014

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Introduction

The annual Student Written Submission has become a very valuable process for the Students' Union. It allows us to put to use all of the feedback collected from our students throughout the academic year and make the student voice heard.

Whilst we firmly believe that our Sabbatical Officers and Senior Management Team have a strong working relationship with the University, the SWS provides a formal platform for furthering the voice of Cardiff University students.

There have been a great number of projects the elected officer team have worked on this year that have been fully embraced by staff at the University. It is largely because of the close working relationship with the University, built on partnership and mutual respect, that we are able to call ourselves a successful Students' Union which makes positive changes to the lives of students.

As was detailed in the student submission for this year's Institutional Review, Cardiff University's biggest weakness is that the institution does not make the most of some of the excellent things that are happening in silos. In order to ensure that all students have the best experience possible, regardless of their course of study, more needs to be done to ensure that good practice is shared by all staff at all levels of the University.

The elected officers would like to thank all those who we've worked with over our year in office and hope, with this submission, Cardiff University continues working to improve the student experience.

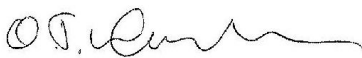
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Learning & Teaching

We are grateful that the University has agreed to invest in the lecture capture project and roll it out to all schools, it will have a significant impact on the learning experience of all students but will be particularly beneficial to those with certain disabilities and those whose first language is not English. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit will eventually be the ideal avenue through which to provide the necessary training and support for staff but there must be measures in place to plug the gap in the meantime.

Recommendation: The University should provide teaching staff with sufficient training to use the equipment and should produce a portfolio of good practice to show how the technology can be best used to enhance their teaching and their students' learning.

The Student Timetabling project is one that the Students' Union has fed into a great deal this year. It is apparent is that the implementation is far more complex than initially anticipated and there are a number of additional features that would enhance the service to students and should be progressed in the future. Whilst many Universities are working on similar projects, if Cardiff University continues progression as planned we may well be ahead of the curve upon delivery.

Recommendation: It is important that the Student Timetabling project is properly resourced in order to deliver a service that meets the needs and expectations of students and in the timescales promised, whilst in the long run, provides an efficient system for staff.

The development of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit is an exciting step for the University and one which the Students' Union wholeheartedly supports. The PCUTL - and related CPD programmes - have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and have offered staff the unique opportunity to share good practice with others from across the University. The promotion of good practice is something which should be encouraged more; staff should be able to progress their ideas, make them a reality and share them with others, not just within their own school or College but University wide.

Recommendation: The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit should be equipped with a "Teaching Excellence Fund" to which staff can apply when they have projects they wish to progress in the name of enhancing learning and teaching.



Assessment & Feedback

There have already been significant efforts to publish examination timetables earlier than in previous years which has been of great benefit to students. There needs to be a continued effort to release timetables as early as possible during every examination period to minimise stress and allow students to plan ahead based on their examination schedule.

Recommendation: The University should review its processes for the scheduling of examinations with the aim of producing timetables as early as possible.

Assessment and feedback is consistently a problem area in NSS results and is also a topic which students frequently wish to discuss on Student Staff Panels, at Academic Council and during Speak Week. It is noted that the Assessment Matters project aimed to drive up student satisfaction in this area however it would appear that significant improvements are yet to be realised.

Recommendation: The Students' Union would like to work with students and the University, on a school-by-school basis, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Assessment Matters project and develop a future strategy for assessment and feedback.

Whilst the Students' Union will always champion the notion that learning should not be focused simply on assessment and the grades achieved, students are paying a great deal of money to attend University in the hope that the benefits will include better job prospects upon graduation. With this, they want to be as informed as possible about their current and potential academic performance. This means many students devise methods of calculating the marks required in future assessments based on their results so far. The different weighting of each assessment, module and year of study can make this a complex process leaving some students in the dark as to where they're heading.

Recommendation: The University should explore the possibility of adopting an Online Progress Tracker through which students can accurately gauge their current level of academic performance as well as the marks required to achieve a better degree classification at the end of the year.



Capital Projects

At present, our current Students' Union facilities and services at The Heath Park Campus do not fit the needs of students. Not only is the space extremely limiting, but the provision that is currently in place does not allow us to provide students studying there with the services they require. For a long time we've focussed primarily on trying to integrate Heath based students with the Union activity based at Park Place, this has been largely unsuccessful as evidenced by the fact that Heath students are significantly less satisfied with the Students' Union than those based closer to the Park Place building (according to NSS 2013 results). These students have very different needs and priorities and the only way forward is to duplicate what we do whilst tailoring services to meet these students' specific needs.

Recommendation: The University should invest in a purpose built Students' Union building at the Heath Park Campus at which scaled and tailored services, activity and social-space should be provided. The Students' Union building could also house student facing University services, mirroring the co-location of a centre for student life on Park Place.

The Students' Union has been involved in the development of the concept paper for a centre for student life. As part of our research to better inform our input, the President 13/14 (Cari Davies) and the CEO (Daniel Palmer) visited Boston Universities to understand how the model works in America.

Whilst a centre for student life presents great opportunity, the potential risks posed to the Students' Union must also be appreciated. Those of greatest concern are:

- a loss of identity,
- competition with our commercial services and thus reduction in our ability to fund our charitable objectives,
- restrictions on licensed activity relating to access and noise levels.

Recommendation: The Students' Union requests that elected officers and senior staff are involved at every stage of conceptualisation, design and implementation of the project and have permanent representation on all steering/working groups and committees for the duration.

Each year, our student groups spend tens of thousands of pounds on renting rehearsal and performance space. There is also a call for improvements to purpose-built facilities in schools like Music and JOMEC, better conference facilities on campus and a large, shared lecturing space. Many of these issues could be resolved by developing an arts centre on campus similar to that being constructed at Bath University. It would act as a performance venue, rehearsal space, exhibition and conference facility and could be rented to external users when not in use by the University or Students' Union.

Recommendation: The development or acquisition of a University Arts Centre, similar to the new 'Centre for the Arts' currently being constructed at Bath University, should receive serious consideration and option analysis from the University.



The £100Million Question survey, which asked students about how they would prioritise capital investment on campus facilities provided the institution with great insight into what students felt would have the greatest impact on their university experience.

The Students' Union recently had a group of architecture students run a design ideas' workshop for a section of our second floor redevelopment. The output from this workshop was of an impressive standard and the ideas produced were taken on board by our contracted designers who are now able to make them a reality.

The development of a new Estates Master Plan is a project that many students would have a great interest in and it is vitally important that students are involved in its development at every possible stage.

Recommendation: Student input should continue to be a primary driving force behind all future capital investments, in order to reflect the priorities and needs of students. This could include general student opinion as well as more detailed input from students on specific courses e.g. City & Regional Planning or Architecture.



Library Resources & Facilities

Many of Cardiff University's libraries are dated and overcrowded. They need aesthetic revamps, as well as additional functionality, to make them enticing and comfortable places to work and study. There has been a huge increase in students using laptops and tablets since the libraries were constructed so there needs to be an increase in the number of power sockets available. There is also demand for greater provision of alternative learning spaces; spaces allowing students to study in a more relaxed environment or in designated areas for group work.

Recommendation: There should be more libraries with the look and feel of the Trevithick Library and the Health Library and fewer that resemble the ASSL.

We understand there is some appetite to consider the development of a 24 hour "super-library". Whilst the Students' Union appreciates the benefits of this, most student feedback suggests that having relevant books and designated study space in the locality of their School is a positive thing and not something they'd not wish to lose. What is apparent, however, is the demand for increased study space which is open and accessible by all students whenever they choose to use it and the most effective way to deliver this is through a large, purpose-built study centre targeted at students from all disciplines.

Recommendation: The Students' Union would welcome the development of a large 24-hour study centre located centrally on campus open to all students.



Services That Support Students

The Students' Union would like to work in partnership with the University to develop and implement our action plans which were submitted alongside signing the Time to Change pledge. The Students' Union action plan received support from over 700 students at the Students' Union Annual General Meeting and aims to encourage open discussion to fight the stigma surrounding mental health, and to commit to tangible improvements in the support available for students at Cardiff University.

Recommendation: The University and Students' Union should work together to ensure that the Time to Change Action Plan is implemented as soon as possible and that its progress is monitored.

Anecdotal evidence from our Advice and Representation Centre and elected officers shows that some students are deterred from submitting a complaint against the University for fear of being singled out and disadvantaged. During the course of this academic year, there have been several issues/concerns that have affected more than one individual such as mistakes in exam papers and course structures that may disadvantage a particular group e.g. international students.

Recommendation: With the support of the University's legal advisors, the University should adopt a group complaints procedure for students and consult the Students' Union in the process. The University should recognise that individual complaints should not be compromised.

For the last two years, Cardiff University has received poor results in the Annual Sexual Health Report Card conducted by Superdrug. Feedback from the Sexual Health Awareness Group, a student led service in the Students' Union, shows that students are concerned about lack of sexual health awareness on campus and the poor quality of sexual health services for students in Cardiff, particularly access to STI clinics.

Recommendation: After a second year of poor results in Superdrug's Annual Sexual Health Report Card, the University should commit to a project to improve sexual health provision for students in Cardiff.

The Students' Union recently took part in a national lobby against cuts to the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), whilst many MPs were receptive it is likely that these cuts will be realised in England with the potential of Wales following suit further down the line. The support that the DSA currently provides many students with disabilities, is the difference between those students being able to continue their studies and dropping out.

Recommendation: The University must be aware of the effects of these potential cuts and put measures in place to ensure that the level of support available to all students is at least maintained at the current level once any cuts are realised.

It has become evident from the Fitness to Practice cases that Students' Union officers have been involved with throughout the year, that students studying professional courses in the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences are far better informed of Fitness to Practice issues throughout their studies than those



from other Colleges. Whilst the number of students Fitness to Practice can affect is greater in the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences than in others, there are also students on courses like Law and Education to whom it applies. It is equally vital that these students, who in some cases have received no information at all, are well informed of the risks.

Recommendation: The quality and quantity of information available on Fitness to Practice issues should be improved on courses outside of the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences, where applicable.



Student Representation

The partnership between the University and Students' Union is a strong one and this is a relationship we are extremely grateful of. It means we feel able to influence important decisions across a wealth of areas and represent students to the highest standard possible. As was raised in the Students' Union's submission for Institutional Review, there are noticeably more opportunities for the Union to engage with senior staff from the College of Biomedical and Life Sciences than from any others.

We welcomed the opportunity to present student feedback to the College Board of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences recently and hope our contribution was a valuable one.

Recommendation: To continue to grow the partnership between the University and Students' Union and to help us best represent students, the Students' Union requests that the University invites one member of the Students' Union Officer Team to sit on each College Board, recognising that there may be certain agenda items (e.g. staffing matters) for which the Officer may be asked to leave the room.

The relationship between the Students' Union and the University is one which appears to be getting stronger year on year, there is a mutually beneficial partnership built on respect and recognition of the hard-work done on both sides. An area where this relationship could be strengthened is around the Students' Union Elections, we saw a huge increase in voter turnout this year and there is no doubt that this was partly down to the increased visibility of the elections across campus for which we are very grateful. However, there are still concerns that many students do not put themselves forward for an elected officer role because they do not feel their school would be supportive of them doing so.

In a mini survey of students who thought about running for the VP Heath Park Campus position but didn't (17 students in total), much of the feedback reflected a lack of understanding from staff about the options available. (This year the VP Heath Park Campus officer has combined her role with clinical activity as part of her dentistry degree).

"Clinical lecturers explained that it may be difficult to get a job within my healthcare profession with a year's gap from qualifying due to the time not in practice". In this case a student was persuaded against a life-changing opportunity to run as an elected officer, where the skills learnt would arguably outweigh any potential "de-skilling".

There have also been many students who struggle with the time pressures of running in an election in the same term as submitting coursework and/or dissertation deadlines. The Students' Union has now committed to scheduling an annual "election week" so that the dates can be set well in advance, we would hope this would make it easier for schools to anticipate and make allowances for students who wish to participate in the election process.

Recommendation: The Students' Union would like to develop a Student Elections Strategy with the University in order to encourage the highest number of candidates and the greatest turnout of voters possible.



At an institutional level, students being treated as partners in their learning experience is a clear expectation. However the reality is that there are significant differences of experience dependant on the school within which a student studies. It is evident that the schools who fully embrace students in quality assurance and who make every effort to ensure the system allows students to engage with the process, as opposed to fearing receiving criticism from students, are the ones who actually get the most from it.

The success of a student rep system in a school is often down to the amount of time the school's student-rep coordinator has to complete the duties required of them. The School of Healthcare Sciences' academic rep system is demonstrative of this, it's one of the better functioning systems and the coordinator in the school is allocated hours.

Recommendation: All student rep coordinators should be allocated hours in which to carry out the additional duties that come with the role.

Both the Law School and the School of Healthcare Sciences have developed a system through which students can submit online comments to their Student-Staff Panel with the option of remaining anonymous should they wish.

Recommendation: Every school should adopt an online Student Staff Panel comment form.

The University boasts that there is student representation on all its decision making bodies. This year UEB has approved a number of student centric projects and Policy and Resources committee have confirmed that the approved spend for UEB is up to £2m on capital projects and £1m on revenue projects. These are significant figures in the eyes of students and we would suggest that the President of the Students' Union should be involved in many of the discussions.

Recommendation: The University should, as set out in HEFCW guidelines, allow student representation at all levels of the University. As such the Students' Union requests a seat for the Students' Union President on University Executive Board for the academic session 2014/15, to be reviewed in the summer of 2015.



Heath Park Students

We recognise the improvements the University is making with the new health services. It is however disappointing that the University was unable to appoint a student occupational health service. Whilst the Students' Union recognises that the University will strive to provide a service sufficient for the 2014/15 intake, we would hope that a more permanent solution could be implemented for the following year which would improve on past services in order to reduce student stress before starting the academic term (when filling out occupational health questionnaires), when attending occupational health appointments, and to improve communication between University occupational health and Health Board occupational health services.

Recommendation: The University should seek to provide a student occupational health service.

Despite previous endeavours, some students still struggle to access a sufficient internet connection whilst on placement. In some instances there are only one or two computers with internet access on site and in others internet is only available in the hospital and not in accommodation (or vice versa). These days, internet access is a necessity when studying at University not just for academic purposes but also in order to access support services remotely.

Recommendation: The University should ensure that all students on placement have sufficient internet access, including access to University email accounts. Either through working with the appropriate boards to provide Eduroam or, in instances where this is not possible and problems still occur, provide dongles to students free of charge.

The idea of an online placement forum (where students could find information on different placements, provided by students who had completed the same placement before) was developed as a result of the "Placement Experience Survey" undertaken 2012/13.

The results made it obvious that students wanted information about their placement from other students and, whilst there is enough information provided by schools on the academic expectations whilst on placements, they were lacking practical information about what to expect whilst away on placement. The kind of information they were seeking included transport advice, food/refreshment provision and what they should take with them e.g. pots, pans, towels. We're glad that the School of Dentistry have recognised this need following our recommendations and are planning to pilot the idea in the next academic year.

Recommendation: The University should continue to develop the student placement forum and to have completed a pilot in the School of Dentistry by the end of next academic year. If successful, the forum should be extended to the whole College for September 2015 and the potential for it to be used University wide explored (particularly in conjunction with the Global Opportunities Centre).

We appreciate the lack of space for expanding numbers of students at the Heath, but having students based in a non-university building causes inequalities in students' educational experiences. Many



students report having a positive experience at East Gate House, which will be further improved with additional floors being hired, however the inconvenience of being located 2.5 miles from other buildings used by the school and from the library is clearly evident. Complaints about EGH (from £100M question survey 2013):

- rooms are hot and too small,
- there is little technology such as computers and projectors to help with teaching,
- there are no proper common room facilities,
- there are no computer rooms for students,
- no library.

Recommendation: Long-term, students should be removed from East Gate House and located at or closer to the Heath Park site to avoid the current isolation of the students studying there.



Postgraduate Research Students

There are inconsistencies in the levels of support, protection and remuneration provided to Postgraduate students who teach.

Recommendation: PGR Students who teach should all be trained to a minimum standard and receive equal treatment when it comes to the level of remuneration. The Union would recommend that this be set at the Living Wage as a minimum, in line with all University staff following recent accreditation.

Some schools run PGR specific student-staff panels, some include PGR academic reps within school-wide student-staff panels and some have no PGR representation at all. The Students' Union offers the same student voice mechanisms for PGR students as it does all other students but this is not utilised as the University Graduate College (UGC) is seen as the representative structure for PGR students. Where the University and Students' Union work in partnership on undergraduate and postgraduate taught representation, the UGC works in isolation on PGR representation.

Recommendation: PGR academic representation should be run in the same as UG/PGT and not split from the student academic representation system.



Sport

After suggestion by the VP Heath Park Campus officer, the CMC Sports and Recreation Centre at the Heath hospital has introduced a women's only hour in their gym. Whilst this is a positive step for women students based at the Heath who use the centre, this isn't a University facility. Many council gyms, pools and other leisure facilities provide women only hours in order to accommodate women who feel more comfortable exercising in a women's only environment, whether for religious, cultural or personal reasons.

Recommendation: The University should seek to provide at least one women's only gym hour in at least one of their gyms.

The University and Students' Union signed the very first Cardiff University Sports Strategy at the end of the academic year 2012/13. 2013/14 has been spent developing an action plan from this which is yet to be finished. The Strategy and Action Plan seeks to provide us with a joined up approach to the delivery of sporting opportunities for students and staff at Cardiff University and when implemented will enable sport to make significant developments moving forwards.

Recommendation: The University and Students' Union Sports Strategy Working Group should complete the Sports Strategy 2013-2018 action plan as soon as possible in order to shape the future of the sporting offer here at Cardiff University.

The addition of a full-size 3G pitch is a very welcome one, it will have a huge impact on sports teams who have previously suffered numerous postponements and cancellations due to the inclement Welsh weather. The demand for improvements to sports facilities is still high and common requests include; resurfacing the current astro-turf pitch and the building of a second one, a University swimming pool, more all-weather surfaces, improvements to facilities and pitch quality at Llanrumney, increased gym space and the creation of purpose built studios.

It is also felt that the location of some facilities is a barrier to participation for a number of students as they aren't within walking distance to student accommodation; halls or otherwise. The Students' Union would urge the University to consider sites which are currently council owned, namely Maindy Leisure Centre and Pontcanna playing fields, which are more local to the rest of campus. The Students' Union and University Sport Department both recognise the Maindy site as particularly desirable however there is time pressure related to its current availability and would need to be acted on as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation: The University should strive to provide first class sporting facilities, developing the sites we already have but making use of available locations as close to the either Park Place and Heath campus as possible.



Summary of Recommendations

Learning & Teaching

Recommendation: The University should provide teaching staff with sufficient training to use the equipment and should produce a portfolio of good practice to show how the technology can be best used to enhance their teaching and their students' learning.

Recommendation: It is important that the Student Timetabling project is properly resourced in order to deliver a service that meets the needs and expectations of students and in the timescales promised, whilst in the long run, provides an efficient system for staff.

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