

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD

REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting date:	17 June 2009
Report title:	Student Voice Project
Author/to be presented by:	Project Manager/Chair of ADC
The Board's responsibilities/ terms of reference which apply are:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for general issues relating to the research, scholarship, learning and teaching and courses at the institution , including criteria for the admission of students; the appointment and removal of internal and external examiners; policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the academic performance of students; the content of the curriculum; academic standards and the validation and review of courses; the procedures for the award of qualifications and honorary academic titles; and the procedures for the expulsion of students for academic reasons, such responsibilities shall be subject where appropriate to the requirements of validating and accrediting bodies; • Responsibility for considering the development of the academic and related activities of the University and the resources needed to support them and for advising the Vice-Chancellor and the Board of Governors thereon; • Responsibility for advising on such matters as the Board of Governors or the Vice-Chancellor may refer to the Academic Board. 	
Summary of what is being presented or proposed	
<p>The Project Director, Prof Kevin Bonnett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) has requested that the final report of the Project, which details the project outcomes and recommendations, is presented to the Board, along with two documents for consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Appendix 1 of the report - a discussion paper on the principles of student representation and the proposed role of student representatives, which has been prepared by MMUnion; ii) Appendix 2 of the report - a proposed revised and enhanced section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook concerned with the evaluation of student opinion (please see report paragraph 3)ix) on page 9 for a full explanation of the purpose of, and enhancements to, this 	

section)

The report was considered by the Student Experience Sub-committee on 27 May and the Academic Development Committee on 3 June 2009. The following points were raised at these meetings:

- Appendix 2 would form the basis of some of the Threshold Standards for student evaluation and feedback;
- the overburdening of students with surveys needed to be avoided, and several NSS-related project outcomes had addressed this issue, (for example paragraph 3)ii).
- The Project Team would provide further advice and support on the gathering of student opinion in areas of the University which required this (for example central service providers);
- The taking of actions in response to surveys needed to be prioritised and reported back to students, as addressed in the main report;
- the NSS results should not be viewed in isolation from other survey results, (addressed in project recommendations and Appendix 2);
- there was a need for better support for student representatives to enable the student voice to be captured through the committee structure, as noted in Recommendation 8.

ADC recommended the Board's approval of the report.

Other key issues/points

<i>i</i>	<i>Background</i> The papers are from the University's Student Voice Project, which commenced in September 2008.
<i>ii</i>	<i>Stakeholders/who is affected /summary of any consultation undertaken</i> Consultation has taken place with faculty and central support service representatives on the Project sub-groups and the Project Steering Group, with the Students' Union, with Directorate, with the Student Experience Sub-Committee and with Academic Development Committee.
<i>iii</i>	<i>How does the report relate to the University's Strategic Plan?</i> These activities are consistent with the University's aim to employ effective mechanisms through which to gauge student satisfaction, which will inform the drive to enhance student satisfaction.
<i>iv</i>	<i>What are the resource implications (including administrative support) of any proposals within the report?</i> Resource implications and recommendations are addressed in the Project Report.

v	<p><i>Indicate any consequences relating to equality, accessibility or diversity. Have any proposals in the report been subject to an equality impact assessment?</i></p> <p>Consultation has taken place with the University's EIA Team, and equality and diversity considerations have been included in the proposed section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook.</p>
vi	<p><i>How will any proposals be implemented, monitored and evaluated (indicate timescale)?</i></p> <p>Subject to approval, the section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook will be implemented from September 2009, with the requirements in this section forming the basis of some of the threshold standards for student evaluation and feedback. The principles of student representation in Appendix 1 would form the basis of future work in this area from the same date.</p>
Action required	
<p>The Board is asked to approve: the recommendations in the report, the proposed principles of student representation (Appendix 1) and the proposed 'Evaluation of Student Opinion' section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook (Appendix 2) and refer to CASQE for action.</p>	

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

STUDENT AND ACADEMIC SERVICES

STUDENT VOICE PROJECT REPORT

1. Introduction

The Student Voice Project commenced at the end of September 2008 with a remit to formulate recommendations for enhancements in the following three areas:

- student representation
- evaluation of student opinion
- National Student Survey

Three project sub-groups were established, with specific remits in these areas. The detailed remit of the sub-groups may be seen in **Appendix 3**. MMUnion was invited to Chair and lead the student representation sub-group, and it is believed to be the first time that such a leadership role has been included in an SAS Service Development Project.

The project plan included the following agreed success criteria:

- i) Student representation system which has a full input into the University's academic decision-making processes;
- ii) Increased student participation in evaluation activities, including the NSS;
- iii) Student evaluation results to be more accessible to University staff and students, in order to facilitate a more holistic approach to the analysis of student evaluation results and to inform actions which will enhance the quality of the student experience;
- iv) Structures, remit and resources to be identified which are necessary for an MMU institutional student survey to be conducted;
- v) Resources to be identified which are necessary for student evaluation activities generally;
- vi) More effective dissemination of good practice in student evaluation methods throughout the University;
- vii) Raised awareness of the NSS and greater accessibility of NSS information for both students and staff.

In accordance with the University's project planning template, a number of 'milestones' were identified, against which the progress and outcomes of the project would be monitored (see **section 3** below)

2. Project Management

A Project Steering Group was established with the following membership:

Prof Kevin Bonnett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) - Project Director
Rob Baker, Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement – Project Manager
Rachel McAlpine, Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement – Project Administrator
Gill Barry (Library Services)
Nigel Farmer (Planning and Management Information)
Gary Hughes, Student Engagement Coordinator, MMUnion

Kate Kirk (Retention & Student Success Project Director)
Nicola Lee, President, MMUnion
Hilary Legge (MMU Cheshire)
Paul Norman, Membership Services Manager, MMUnion
Hetal Patel (Faculty of Health, Psychology and Social Care/Institute of Education)
Alicia Prowse (Centre for Learning and Teaching)
David Saxton, Vice-President (Education & Welfare), MMUnion

Faculties, some central support services and MMUnion were invited to nominate representatives to participate in each of the project's three sub-groups, and the project aimed to use electronic communication wherever possible to minimise the need to attend face to face meetings.

3. Full summary of project outcomes against each of the project milestones

The Steering Group agreed at the beginning of the project that the emphasis would be on the achievement of practical outcomes and actions which could be put into practice at the earliest opportunity, without necessarily waiting until these were summarised at the end of the project. This emphasis on action and practicality has characterised the priorities and the work of the project.

The following paragraphs show the project milestones in bold, followed in each case by a 'headline' summary of outcomes achieved for that project milestone and a list of specific outcomes.

i) NSS 2008 results disseminated to faculties, along with students' open comments. Agreement on faculties' further NSS information needs. Further NSS 2008 information and analyses provided to faculties.

Summary of project outcomes: The timing of the project start date (October 2008), and the University's relatively poor NSS 2008 results, necessitated the prioritisation of NSS-related milestones in the early months of the project. CASQE and Planning & Management Information proactively and systematically asked faculties to consider their further NSS results information needs, so that these needs could be met. This consultation took place through the NSS sub-group and via attendance at Faculty meetings, for example at Faculty Executive Groups. Significant improvements have been made to the NSS results information which is made available to faculties.

Specific outcomes:

- Free text comments were made available to all Deans as standard practice for the first time – in the past, faculties had to request these.
- For the first time, CASQE/P&MI proactively offered to arrange staff briefing sessions in each faculty to summarise the results information available – two briefing sessions were requested and delivered jointly by CASQE and P&MI.
- In response to the project's consultation with faculties, P&MI produced much enhanced and comprehensive analyses of the NSS results, and posted them on the P&MI Intranet with the results data from Ipsos so that they were accessible to University staff.
- In response to a project recommendation to the DVC (Student Experience) arising directly from feedback received from faculties, the Director of Planning and Management Information negotiated a deal with Ipsos, under which the NSS 2008

and NSS 2009 results would be presented by programme for the first time, as well as by subject code and department as previously (please see **Recommendation 4**).

- In response to suggestions from sub-group members, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) emailed FADC Chairs, asking them to arrange for faculties to report to students on the actions taken in response to the NSS results, so 'closing the feedback loop'. It is the first time faculties have been formally required to do this.
- In direct response to a project request following the 'Organisation and Management' results in the NSS 2008, the University's Telecommunications Manager brought forward a number of further staff training sessions in the use of Web-based technology to contact students in the event of rearranged classes.

ii) Recommendations on NSS 2009 awareness-raising and communication strategy. Implementation of NSS 2009 awareness-raising and communication activities throughout the survey.

Summary of project outcomes: The current participation rate for the NSS 2009 is the highest MMU has ever achieved. At the time of writing the latest MMU participation rate available from Ipsos-MORI is 54.36%, an increase of almost 2.5% on last year at a time when participation in the HE sector as a whole has remained roughly the same as last year. This increase has been achieved through a huge amount of commitment and hard work from faculty and central staff and MMUnion, and a strong emphasis on University/MMUnion partnership-working. It is telling that online participation at MMU, the main method that our internal efforts are able to affect, has increased by nearly 31% on last year for non-NHS funded students.

For the first time, MMUnion has coordinated student representatives to encourage participation amongst their fellow students, and this has allowed the further reduction of the already-limited use of central emails reminding students to participate in the survey.

Specific outcomes:

- Sub-group members were consulted on how successful the NSS 2008 awareness-raising activities had been in maximising participation. This supplemented a wider consultation of faculty-based colleagues which took place in the Summer.
- University/MMUnion agreement on NSS 2009 schedule of actions aimed at maximising participation.
- In response to sub-group consultation, and to faculty and student feedback in 2008, the schedule featured less direct email contact with students, and no contact by text. This aimed to avoid overburdening students with requests to take part in the light of Ipsos's own comprehensive promotional campaign.
- Following a project recommendation to the DVC (Student Experience) arising directly from feedback received from faculties, an email was sent to students before the survey commenced, giving them the option to opt out if they so wished – again, this was aimed at reducing the overburdening of students.
- Faculties organised and delivered an extensive range of local activities aimed at maximising participation.
- Improved information was provided to faculties to assist their local activities, for example: Ipsos's own promotional schedule, numbers of eligible students split by programme, student contact details offered.
- MMUnion addressed students directly in classes, on request from faculties.
- MMUnion/University collaboration in producing faculty posters which reported back to students on NSS-related actions taken. The posters were produced with extensive assistance and coordination from the Marketing Office.
- CASQE regularly disseminated good practice in maximising participation to faculty staff, and provided regular updates on participation rates.

iii) Review and development of the student representation system. Student representatives identified and contact details passed to MMUnion for training. Student representative training sessions completed.

Summary of project outcomes: MMUnion led a review of the University's system of student representation, producing a discussion paper which recommended ten principles of student representation and which considered the general role of student representatives (**Appendix 1**). Consultation of staff took place, including project faculty representatives and Chairs of Faculty Academic Development Committees. MMUnion also developed the role of student representatives more generally, and again organised and delivered student representative training sessions.

Specific outcomes:

- Faculties were asked to provide student representative contact details via CASQE's online database by early in the Autumn Term – over 800 student representative details were received and passed to MMUnion.
- A joint MMUnion/CASQE email was sent to link tutors at partner colleges and at MMU, asking for student representatives to be made aware of the training available. This resulted in a number of partner colleges forwarding representative contact details to MMUnion, the first time they have ever done so.
- For the first time, CASQE collated faculty and programme committee dates for MMUnion, in order to help the planning of training dates.
- MMUnion introduced a regular 'Course Rep Update' which it distributed to student representatives, and also introduced a new Course Rep of the Year award.
- CASQE provided financial support to MMUnion to enable student representatives to attend the NUS Course Rep Conference in Bristol.

iv) Completion of audit of the University's student evaluation activities. Dissemination of good evaluation practice throughout the University.

Specific outcomes:

- CASQE coordinated an audit of evaluation activities undertaken by MMU faculties and services, and on completion distributed a summary to project members.
- The audit highlighted a wide diversity of practice across the University, including examples of particularly innovative good practice. CASQE contacted the staff concerned to request further details of this good practice.
- CASQE disseminated the details of good practice via CeLT's academic practice database, and an allstaff email was sent to publicise them, with staff invited to submit further examples for dissemination.

v) Research completed into examples of good student evaluation practice within the HE sector.

Specific outcomes:

- CASQE conducted desk research into examples of good evaluation practice within the HE sector, and consulted members of the Association of University Administrators via their Web forum. Examples of good practice informed various areas of the project, including the enhancement of the 'evaluation of student opinion' section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook (**Recommendation 2**)
- CASQE arranged an exploratory meeting with the Open University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI) regarding their study into

student engagement on behalf of the UUK/HEFCE/NUS/HEA Cross Sector Student Engagement Group.

- CASQE and MMUnion attended the launch event for the CHERI report on student engagement.
- CASQE and MMUnion held discussions with the QAA over the latter's own Student Engagement Strategy.

vi) Drafting of proposals on improving how the University 'closes the feedback loop' and reports to students and staff the actions which result from student evaluation.

Specific outcomes:

- For the first time (subject to the approval of Academic Board), a requirement was included in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook for programme teams and central support services to feed back to students at least once in every academic year on the actions taken in response to student views, and also included was guidance on good practice (**Recommendation 2**).
- Examples of good practice were posted on CeLT's academic practice database.

vii) Proposals on the timing, remit and structure of an MMU institutional student survey, including resources required.

Summary of project outcomes: Evaluation of student opinion sub-group members were consulted on their views regarding the possible establishment of a University-wide institutional student survey, and the matter was also discussed at the Project Steering Group. There was general agreement that it would not be desirable to establish an institutional student survey at the present time, and that the focus should instead be on more effectively acting upon the results of existing institution-wide surveys such as the NSS, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer. Significant progress has been made in supporting this focus, and some resource issues have been identified (please see **paragraph 3)x** below).

Specific outcomes:

- There was agreement that, for the first time, the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer would be considered and analysed centrally alongside those from the National Student Survey, and information on issues arising from the three surveys would be made available to University staff and MMUnion. This should enable a more holistic view of survey information in order to better inform action planning, and programme teams will be required to comment in the annual monitoring exercise on actions taken in response to the results of these surveys (**Recommendation 5**).
- P&MI agreed to assume an enhanced and pivotal role in producing the central analysis of the above surveys, working in close liaison with other SAS departments.
- The Project Steering Group gave its support to the Marketing Office's request to pilot the Domestic Student Barometer survey in Spring/Autumn 2009. It was hoped that this would enable comparisons to be drawn between the experiences of Home and International students. The pilot would be evaluated after the Autumn wave of the survey (**Recommendation 9**).
- The Project Steering Group gave its support to a request from the Retention and Student Success Project Director for the trial of a Year 1 Autumn Term survey which would provide essential retention-specific information (**Recommendation 7**).
- In response to a project recommendation, the DVC (Student Experience) has established a cross-University NSS Results Working Group, which has commenced

planning for how the University will address the results of the NSS 2009 once they are available in the Summer.

viii) In liaison with the PARM/AME Review Project, recommendations on more effectively embedding actions arising from student evaluation within institutional decision-making processes.

Summary of project outcomes: Progress has been made, as detailed below. However, clarity will be required on the future of the Committee Structure Review Group proposals in order to build upon this progress and to prioritise an effective student voice across the University's committees (**Recommendation 8**).

Specific outcomes:

- Subject to the approval of Academic Board, the enhanced 'evaluation of student opinion' section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook will feed into the annual monitoring exercise (**Recommendations 2 & 3**).
- Proposals on student representation in MMUnion's discussion paper, particularly regarding the proposed student-staff liaison committees and the enhanced role of student representatives (**Recommendation 1**).
- Work undertaken in the project will inform and support the proposed introduction of threshold standards for the student experience (**Recommendation 10**).

ix) Production of draft protocol/guidelines on student evaluation, covering both MMU-based and collaborative students.

Summary of project outcomes: The current 'Surveys of Student Experience' section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook (ARPH) has been comprehensively revised and enhanced following consultation with staff, including Directorate, project faculty representatives, Chairs of Faculty Academic Development Committees, and with MMUnion (**Appendix 2**). Subject to the approval of Academic Board, this will ensure that many of the examples of good practice identified in the project (both from MMU and sector-wide) will for the first time become requirements in our normal quality processes. Adherence will be monitored through the annual monitoring exercise, and the annual monitoring documentation will be amended during the Summer to accommodate the revised section of the ARPH. This embedding of good practice within our normal quality processes should ensure more consistency in evaluation activities across the University (**Recommendation 2**).

In addition, if Academic Board is able to approve the revised ARPH section in June, this embedding of good practice can be included in our institutional audit briefing paper as direct evidence that the University has addressed the 2004 audit recommendation "to continue the development of a more systematic institution-wide means of obtaining and responding to student feedback."

Specific outcomes:

Enhancements to this section of the ARPH include the following:

- Recognition of the essential requirement for University/MMUnion partnership working in all aspects of evaluating and responding to student opinion.
- Clear articulation of the different levels of and purposes for evaluating student opinion.
- Guidance on the methods available to gather student opinion.

- Statement of good practice on inviting student participation in choosing/designing the method of evaluation.
- Requirement for programme teams to communicate effectively with students on the arrangements for gathering student opinion and the benefits of student participation.
- Requirement for programme teams to consider the results of local evaluations alongside other institutional and national surveys, in order to gain an accurate and holistic view of student opinion.
- Requirement for programme teams to comment in the annual monitoring exercise on actions taken in response to the results of these surveys.
- Requirement for programme teams to review the appropriateness of evaluation methods with students at least once in every periodic review cycle.
- Requirement for programme teams to ensure that non-campus based students have an appropriate means of making their views known at the same time as campus-based students, and for link tutors and partner college staff to share good practice in student feedback mechanisms.
- Requirement for regular surveys of recent graduates.
- Requirement for anonymity and confidentiality in evaluation.
- Requirement to report back to students at least once in every academic year on actions taken in response to their views.
- Statement of good practice on programme teams arranging for 'informal' student opinion to be reported to programme committees.
- Statement of good practice on reporting back to staff on actions taken in response to student views.
- Guidance on the methods available to 'close the feedback loop'.
- Statements of good practice on maximising participation in the NSS and on the provision of NSS results information.
- Commitment to central analysis of the results of the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer, with distribution of the analyses to University staff and MMUnion.

x) Identification of and recommendations on resources required for student evaluation activities, and the exploitation of existing expertise within the University.

Summary of project outcomes: There will be local resource implications in respect of P&MI's enhanced and pivotal role in providing a central analysis of the University's overall results from the NSS, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer. However, it is envisaged that, for the University as a whole, this enhanced role may save resources in making the issues raised across the three surveys much clearer and more accessible to staff and to MMUnion.

There may also be resource implications for faculties arising from some requirements in the revised 'evaluation of student opinion' section of the ARPH (Appendix 1), for example the requirements to gather the views of non-campus based students and recent graduates. A full analysis of resources required for student evaluation activities will only be possible when pilot surveys commissioned outside the project (for example ICT Strategy Group online unit survey, Domestic Student Barometer) have been evaluated, and when the outcome of the Committee Structure Review is confirmed. In particular, an assessment will be needed as to the possible suitability of the online unit survey technology for other internal surveys (**Recommendations 6, 9 & 11**).

4. Project recommendations

It is recommended:

1. That Academic Board should be asked to approve the 10 principles of student representation in MMUnion's discussion paper. The principles will act as a basis for future work in this area, which will be led by MMUnion in association with CASQE and CeLT.
2. That Academic Board should be asked to approve the revised 'evaluation of student opinion' section of the Academic Regulations & Procedures Handbook (ARPH), which will embed good practice identified during the project within the University's quality processes.
3. If the revised ARPH section is approved, that the annual monitoring exercise documentation should be amended to enable the monitoring of compliance with the requirements in the revised section of the ARPH.
4. That in the annual monitoring exercise, programme teams should actively consider the NSS 2009 results by programme in addition to other evaluation data, in formulating actions in response to student views.
5. Regarding paragraph 8.1 of the revised ARPH section, that collaboration should take place over the coming months between P&MI, CASQE, CeLT, RED and MMU International to produce the first central analysis of the University's overall results from the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer, and that this analysis should be made available to all University staff and to MMUnion. P&MI will have an enhanced and pivotal role in producing this central analysis.
6. That CASQE, CeLT, P&MI and MMUnion should work with the ICT Strategy Group to evaluate the success of the latter's online unit survey pilot once the pilot results are available, and, in consultation with faculty/campus colleagues, to assess whether the online survey technology may be useful to other faculties.
7. That CASQE, CeLT and MMUnion should work with the Retention and Student Success Project Director to trial a Year 1 Autumn Term survey which will provide essential retention-specific information, and should consider the evaluation of the success of the ICT Strategy Group's pilot survey and whether this technology may be suitable for use in the RSS survey.
8. That the further work of the Committee Structure Review Group should include close consultation with CASQE, CeLT and MMUnion, and ensure that the Group's outcomes prioritise an effective student voice across the University's committees.
9. That CASQE, CeLT, P&MI and RED should work with the Marketing Office to evaluate the success of the University's pilot of the Domestic Student Barometer survey in 2009.
10. That members of the Student Voice Project should maintain an active involvement in the proposed University Threshold Standards relating to student evaluation and feedback, and contribute proactively to ensure their effectiveness.
11. That further consideration of resource issues pertaining to the evaluation of student opinion should take place after related matters commissioned outside the project

have been concluded, for example the ICT Strategy Group pilot online unit survey, the Domestic Student Barometer pilot and the Committee Structure Review.

APPENDIX 1

MMUnion discussion paper: principles of student representation

MMUnion would like colleagues across the university to support us as we prepare these principles for student representation, as part of the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor's report on the student voice to Academic Board in June. We have tried to reflect the good advice and experience that we have received from students and staff in ten principles. We have also tried to describe how our new principles will support student participation in the quality assurance and quality enhancement processes at MMU.

These principles are new and, if they are agreed and adopted, they will mean colleagues across the university having to do things differently to support the student voice. Where possible, MMUnion would like to see as many of these principles supported and actioned by the start of the 2009 to 2010 academic year.

MMUnion believes that 'listening to the student voice' is, at a basic level, established mechanisms that give due respect to the collective opinions of learners about their education, and produces change in response to it. New and innovative ways of listening to students, on their terms, are essential if we are to accurately and sensitively understand what learners want from their university experience.

Principles

1. MMU and MMUnion should establish an honest and collaborative relationship with regards to the student representative system, where expectations are clear and met, and progress and purpose are annually reviewed
2. The student voice should clearly progress through unit, programme, department, faculty and university levels.
3. The student voice should be appropriately documented at every level. This makes feedback much easier, as comments can be directly linked to action.
4. At unit level, there should be regularly scheduled and facilitated opportunities for all students to freely discuss the quality of their education.
5. At programme, department and university level, students will be able to scrutinise and discuss all comments and actions already taken. This makes identifying good practice and systemic issues much easier.
6. At all levels, student representatives will be supported to campaign on issues of quality enhancement.
7. At all levels, there should be an agreement about how MMU will communicate progress to students. Student representatives should be consulted on the best method, but should not be the sole means of dissemination.
8. Academic and central staff will support the recruitment process of student representatives with guidance and support from MMUnion.
9. Local, innovative ways of listening to the student voice can be agreed between staff and students in accordance with the above principles
10. MMUnion will support all staff and students involved in student representation with thorough training

Commentary

The quality assurance process

Student representatives are most often described as having two roles; student representatives are 'there' for students to speak to about any problems they might encounter and they attend committees to present these problems to staff, expecting a solution. They are understood to be a channel for the university to identify areas of concern quickly and a means of reporting action back to students. Programme staff have very high expectations of representatives, namely that they accurately represent the whole of a cohort and bring the 'right' issues (such as teaching and learning rather than canteen prices) to their attention.

This model may have worked well in smaller institutions with a relatively homogeneous student body, but MMUnion believes that it is no longer sustainable. Student lives are more complex in modern HE: students have a variety of additional demands on their time; students are less likely to be 'in residence' and easy to access for their opinion; student concerns legitimately cover a wide range of issues in addition to learning, teaching and assessment. Dedicated resources and specialist support for student voice activity are almost non-existent and there is low attendance at training for student representatives.

There are other, better ways of quickly identifying 'problems' and supporting the quality assurance process, many of which operate in addition to the MMU formal committee system. Surveys and focus groups are frequent, perhaps too frequent, features of higher education and adequately collect student opinion without suffering from sector criticism of being 'unrepresentative', a charge often levelled at eager volunteer student representative. Attendance at a committee is rarely the fastest or best way of addressing the issues that students face by staff, much less by students. We don't propose to try and breathe life into a system that doesn't really work.

MMUnion proposes that student-staff liaison committees (SSLCs) are seen as the primary way of collecting 'raw' student opinion for the student representative system. We understand SSLCs to be used in some parts of MMU as scheduled termly contact time, in each unit or cohort, where students are facilitated in commenting on any issues that they wish to, perhaps with some guidance into areas such as teaching or support services. Their feedback should be recorded so that the programme Committee and others can see exactly what students care about. As the system embeds, this will also be the opportunity to feedback on actions taken.

The quality enhancement process

MMUnion proposes to recruit and train student representatives on a totally new premise; they will be students talking to students about what they would like to see improved in an annually determined topical aspect of their education, for example, the induction process, or feedback, or personal tutors. Student representatives will attend committees to present this agenda for change. At programme level, they will also comment on unit feedback and actions.

APPENDIX 2

ACADEMIC REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES HANDBOOK

THE EVALUATION OF STUDENT OPINION (Draft Version 6)

The active participation of students in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes is an essential and valuable component in maintaining and improving the quality of learning opportunities. The evaluation of student opinion and appropriate response to the results is a key indicator in the University's processes for the assurance and enhancement of academic quality and is a required element of the evidence base for the Annual Monitoring Exercise and periodic review.

Both at the institutional and local level, the University and the Students' Union work in close partnership in all aspects of evaluating and responding to student opinion, recognising that such active collaboration is fundamental to our joint commitment to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students.

1. The scope of the evaluation of student opinion

- 1.1 At institutional level, the University participates in three national surveys: the National Student Survey (annual), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (every two years), and the International Student Barometer (twice a year).
- 1.2 At faculty/campus level, the evaluation of student opinion normally takes place by unit and by programme and/or level of study. All units offered to students in each academic year must be formally evaluated, and programmes feed the findings from such surveys into formal unit reports, in accordance with the requirements of the University's Annual Monitoring Exercise, as published in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook.
- 1.3 Student consultation and opinion is an essential component of the evidence base for programme approval, review and modification processes.
- 1.4 Since 2007, the University has made available on an optional basis a standard unit evaluation questionnaire as one example of good practice, which programme teams may use or adapt. The questionnaire is available as one of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook Appendices on the CASQE website.
- 1.5 Central educational and support services (for example, Library Services, ICTS, Student Services) carry out regular evaluations of student and user opinion, some of which may be concerned with non-academic aspects of the student experience. The results of these evaluations are fed into the University's Annual Monitoring Exercise.
- 1.6 Many programme teams are obliged to gather and respond to student opinion in order to fulfil the specific requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

2. Methods of obtaining student opinion

- 2.1 The gathering of student opinion should be undertaken in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. A range of methods is available, which may include the following:

- Paper questionnaires
- Online questionnaires
- Informal contact with staff, for example during lectures and seminars and through appointments with staff
- Focus groups – support in facilitating these is offered by the Centre for Learning and Teaching
- Brief ‘snapshot’ surveys, for example distributing ‘post-it’ notes in classes and inviting views on a particular topic, with the results being reviewed and discussed, with the aim of responding to these views as soon as possible and before the formal end of unit evaluation
- National Student Survey
- Programme Committees
- Staff-Student Liaison Committees
- Online discussion fora
- Inviting student attendance at, and participation in, University and Faculty Learning and Teaching events

2.2 It is good practice to involve students in discussions over the choice of evaluation method and in the design of the chosen method, for example in designing the questions to be included in a questionnaire.

2.3 It is required that programme teams ensure that the arrangements for gathering student views, both formal and informal, are clearly communicated to students, for example in the student handbook or online student information. Clear communication should take place with students, in order to emphasise the value of their participation in evaluation activities, and the benefits of this participation in informing improvements in the service provided to students.

2.4 It is required that programme teams consider the results of their local evaluations alongside other institutional and national surveys, such as the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, and the International Student Barometer, in order to gain as accurate and holistic a view as possible of student views when planning actions.

2.5 It is required that programme teams ensure that evaluation methods are appropriate for students in all equality groups (disability, gender, age and ethnicity), and review the appropriateness of evaluation methods with students at least once in every periodic review cycle, making adjustments as necessary.

3. Non-campus based students

3.1 It is required that programme teams ensure that students who are not required to attend regular campus-based classes, for example distance and e-learning students, have an appropriate means of making their views known at the same time as campus-based students; for example, the facility to email responses and comments to a nominated member of staff, who will then be responsible for ensuring that these views are addressed and that actions taken are reported back to students at the same time as to campus-based students.

3.2 It is required that collaborative link tutors ensure that students in partner colleges have an appropriate means of making their views known at the same time as campus-based students, so that their experiences may be compared with those of campus-based

students to ensure a consistent learning experience for all. It is required that link tutors and staff in partner colleges share good practice in the development of student feedback mechanisms.

- 3.3 Recent graduates comprise the only student constituency in a position to offer a comprehensive opinion on the effectiveness of the complete cycle of a programme, from pre-entry to employability. As such a potentially useful and significant evidence base, it is required that surveys of graduate opinion of the quality of their programme are undertaken regularly; as a minimum, the views of recent graduates should be fed into the periodic review process (see the 'Periodic Review' section of the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook.)

4. Anonymity

- 4.1 It is required that programme teams and central support services ensure that anonymity and confidentiality are a feature of evaluation mechanisms, and where necessary they should include students in discussions over the best way for this to be assured. For example, e-learning students may be invited to email their views to a student representative, who will then submit an anonymised summary of these views to the programme team.
- 4.2 Exceptionally, if for any reason it is not possible to guarantee full anonymity in an evaluation mechanism, it is required that the programme team or support service should make this clear to students in advance and that students are able to opt out of participating if they so wish.

5. Closing the feedback loop

- 5.1 Programme teams should involve students in discussions over the results of evaluations and how those results should be addressed, for example in the prioritisation of proposed actions in response to evaluation results.
- 5.2 At least once in every academic year, programme teams and central support services are required to report to students the actions taken in response to student views, including those taken in response to the National Student Survey, in order to 'close the feedback loop' and to summarise the improvements which have resulted from student participation in evaluation activities. If it has not been possible to take actions in respect of some stated student views, it is required that the reasons for this should be clearly explained to students.
- 5.3 Faculty/campuses may choose to ask programme teams to report actions taken to a single faculty/campus officer, who then reports these actions to students on behalf of all programme teams. If this method is preferred, it is essential that students receive the same level of detail as they would have received directly from the programme team.
- 5.4 It is good practice for programme teams to arrange for student opinion gathered informally (for example, during lectures and seminars) to be reported to programme committees, so that there is a minuted response to any issues raised informally. Programme teams may choose to arrange for informal student opinion to be gathered for this purpose by a nominated member of staff.

5.5 In addition to reporting to students the actions taken in response to student views, all staff in the area covered by the evaluation (department, faculty/campus, central support service etc) should also be kept fully and regularly informed of these actions or of the reasons why it has not been possible to take actions in respect of some student views. This may avoid the possible duplication of staff effort in addressing the results of evaluations.

5.6 A range of methods, both formal and informal, may be used to close the feedback loop. The method chosen should be appropriate to the students concerned. Examples include:

- Websites
- Emails
- Notices on student and staff notice boards
- Electronic notice boards
- Posters
- Programme Committee minutes through student representatives
- Informal reporting by staff, for example announcements in lectures and seminars

6. Dissemination of good practice

6.1 Staff should disseminate examples of particularly successful and innovative evaluation practice on the academic practice database maintained by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

7. National Student Survey

7.1 Final year undergraduates are surveyed through the National Student Survey, the results of which appear on the Unistats website. Programmes are expected to address relevant issues arising from the NSS survey as part of the required evidence base for the Annual Monitoring Exercise.

7.2 The management of the NSS is coordinated jointly by CASQE and PMI, the latter being primarily responsible for the integrity of the student sample, the provision of appropriate statistical information and for the technical aspects of the survey.

7.3 The University and the Students' Union work in close partnership in managing all aspects of the survey. Good practice includes the following:

Maximising participation

- The University and the Students' Union agree a schedule of activities on an annual basis, which are aimed at encouraging student participation in the NSS
- These activities are evaluated each year and sectoral good practice is incorporated into the University's procedures wherever appropriate
- The University provides clear information to students and staff on the survey and its format, timing and importance
- Response rates are monitored centrally and regular updates provided to faculties throughout the survey
- An embargo on other surveys of final year undergraduates for the opening weeks of the survey

Results information

- The University arranges to receive results by subject, department and by individual programme
- PMI arranges on an annual basis for NSS results to be made accessible online to all staff, and provides further analyses as required
- Free text comments are made available to Deans, for further distribution as they judge to be appropriate
- CeLT provides support to departments, faculties and campuses in responding to the NSS results, including guidance notes posted on the CeLT website
- Programme teams are required to comment in the annual monitoring exercise on actions taken in response to the results of the survey

8. International Student Barometer and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

8.1 Subject to collation of the results by external surveying organisations, the results of the above surveys are considered and analysed centrally alongside those from the National Student Survey, and information on issues arising from the three surveys is made available to University staff and the Students' Union. Programme teams are required to comment in the annual monitoring exercise on actions taken in response to the results of these surveys.

APPENDIX 3

STUDENT VOICE PROJECT

REMITTS OF THE PROJECT SUB-GROUPS

There are three sub-groups within the Student Voice Project Group, with specific remits as follows:

Student representation sub-group

i) To work collaboratively with, and to support, the Students' Union in developing the student representative system, in particular working closely with the MMUnion Student Engagement Coordinator and the Vice-President (Education and Welfare).

Evaluation of student opinion sub-group

i) To investigate and disseminate good practice (internal and sector-wide) in capturing and evaluating the views of students. Both formal (eg surveys) and informal (eg the Services Student Forum) practice will be considered. Where appropriate, this will include the use of electronic methods of evaluation and results analysis, in order to facilitate the publication of results to students and to remove the burden of manual results analysis from staff;

ii) To produce a coordinated student evaluation strategy, including considering the complementarity of evaluation methods and reducing duplication and 'survey fatigue';

iii) To consider how actions resulting from student evaluation may be reported back to students and staff, thereby 'closing the feedback loop', and how two-way communication may be facilitated over this matter.

NSS sub-group

i) To promote and raise awareness of the NSS;

ii) To monitor response rates;

iii) To agree the information needs of faculties, both throughout the survey and when the NSS results are made available;

iv) To improve NSS-related communication to students and staff.