

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

# HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW STUDENT SUBMISSION

January 2016

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THE UNION  
MANCHESTER  
METROPOLITAN  
UNIVERSITY

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## INTRODUCTION

The Union, Manchester Metropolitan University is delighted to present the Student Submission as part of the institution's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Higher Education Review. We value the opportunity for engagement in this process and the submission provides an overview of what it is like to be a student at Manchester Met. A broad range of student views are found within the document and evidence is taken from a range of sources dating from 2009 to 2015 to ensure the opinions in the report reflect both past and current students.

The report commends the University in a number of areas and recognises that during a time of rapid change there have been many positive improvements since the last review. Where good progress has been identified, the report suggests

actions or areas of joint work that would take the University from 'good to great' by further improving quality and student experience. These should be considered 'stretch targets' and areas where the Students' Union is keen to work with the University to achieve excellence. Where evidence has identified remaining or emerging challenges, the report suggests next steps for consideration.

I would like to thank staff within the institution for their ongoing help, support and advice with finding evidence for the submission. I applaud the institution on their comprehensive involvement of The Union across various different strands of work. I hope that my successors find this report useful in working to support Manchester Met to achieve the next steps set out in an ever-changing higher education setting.



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# METHODOLOGY

A working group of students' union staff and elected sabbatical officers collaborated to research and compile the Student Submission. Participants included the Education Officer (Lead Student Representative), President, Vice President Cheshire, Chief Executive Officer, Head of Membership Development, Cheshire Site Manager, Advice Centre Managers, Engagement Manager, Communications Manager and Research Manager.

The document draws upon a range of primary and secondary research carried out by either the University or The Union and data from national surveys including the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the International Student Barometer (ISB). The submission also includes information obtained at various institutional committees.

The report broadly follows the template for the Student Submission provided in Annex 3 of the QAA's guidance 'Higher Education Review: Survival Guide for the Lead Student Representatives' with a few minor changes to some of the questions to accommodate nuance. This provides a rounded commentary on the institution, its services and the support offered to students of Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Union is thankful to Manchester Met for allowing full disclosure at every stage of compiling their Self-evaluation Document via students' union staff and officer membership of the Higher Education Review Working Group, whilst also respecting our autonomy in compiling the Student Submission.

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# 1. Student Representative Body

## 1.1. What is your relationship like with your university?

The Students' Union is the recognised autonomous representative body for students of the Manchester Metropolitan University<sup>1</sup>. The Union enjoys positive and useful relationships with staff in all areas of University activity including academic, senior management and professional services. Relationships are maintained either directly with The Union or through union supported course representative structures.

The Union and the University has actively worked to ensure continuity and continued strength of relationships between both organisations since the last audit. A joint review of the relationship between The Union and the University in 2012 considered how a more overt partnership may be created between the two organisations, so that the University could support The Union to provide Manchester Met students with optimal and sector-leading facilities, services, support and opportunities for representation and engagement. The report documented formal and informal support mechanisms and has resulted in more strategic use of The Union as a partner in improving student experience.<sup>2</sup>

The institution recognises union representation on the majority of senior decision-making committees through the elected sabbatical officers, including the University's Board of Governors, Academic Board, Student Experience Committee and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Student representation on committees was reviewed in 2013, and resulted in increased student committee representation as well as the option of membership of students' union professional staff to support officers and on several university committees. The Union's relationship is also strong with the University's Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement (CASQE) and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) divisions, working closely with staff across both on academic representation and

quality through consultation with elected officers, the student engagement team and the Advice Centre.

The Union is in the third year of its Course Rep Support Staff (CRSS) structure, which consists of one student staff member per faculty. The additional support was identified as one of the recommendations of the relationship review in November 2012<sup>3</sup> and funded as part of an agreed increase in annual grant from the University to The Union. The role of CRSS has developed and is now much more focussed on monthly targets and tasks for staff in gathering information and feedback from students, whilst supporting course reps within their given faculty. The support for academic representation at faculty level is strong with CRSS and elected officers being invited to meetings such as Faculty Student Experience Committee and Faculty Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The benefits of student representation was recognised by students and staff through the review of student involvement in Programme Approval, Review and Modification (PARM) panels.<sup>4</sup>

The Union and University have made significant investment in course representation since the last review. Course representation operates well as a partnership between the University and The Union, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of student autonomy and independence. The Union works closely with faculty staff, CELT and CASQE to recruit, train and support course reps. Faculty staff also work closely with The Union to promote the course rep system and ensure representatives are registered for training and development sessions. The level of faculty support for course reps throughout the year and for the recruitment processes is generally good, but there are pockets of inconsistency across faculties. These inconsistencies have a variety of causes and are not necessarily a negative reflection on faculties, but rather could be due to the fact that The Union's relationship with certain student groups requires further development. This includes those students who have a low number of class contact hours or a high level of placement hours. At times, what seems to be non-engagement with the course rep system may simply be a non-engagement with The Union in that representatives may exist and fulfil the role

<sup>1</sup> <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about/governance/governors/>

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1: Review of the Relationship Between the University and the Students' Union

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1: Review of the Relationship Between the University and the Students' Union

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/event/docs/students-Faculty-PARM-events.pdf>

but haven't registered on The Union's system to then receive updates and training.

There is uniformity across the University in regard to the programme committee and staff student liaison committee structure with course reps now being included as full members on programme committees and contributing to the quoracy of meetings. The inclusion of course reps as full members emphasises their equal value and importance to the University, and is welcomed by The Union.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. What services do the student representative body provide?

The Union employs around 60 professional staff and over 150 student staff to deliver services across two campuses in four key areas of work: Voice; Opportunities; Advice; and Space. The table below details the main activities of each area of work. All activity in The Union supports the advancement of education at Manchester Met. Space and Opportunities support extracurricular activity, and align well with the University's employability and international strategies. Voice and Advice directly support academic representation, and are the main points of interaction between The Union and University for advancing academic quality.

Voice	Opportunities	Advice	Space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six sabbatical officers</li> <li>• Eight CRSS</li> <li>• 980+ course reps</li> <li>• Campaigns support and facilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 65 sports clubs</li> <li>• 90 societies</li> <li>• University and community volunteering opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic</li> <li>• Financial</li> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• Welfare</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bar</li> <li>• The Salutation</li> <li>• The Shop (Manchester, Cheshire and online)</li> <li>• Bookable social and study spaces</li> </ul>

## 1.3. If you have previously had a QAA review, how have things progressed since then?

Manchester Met is transformed since the previous Institutional Audit in 2009, through its campus regeneration project, which has seen a £350million investment in the institution's estate, and its four-year comprehensive change programme

Enhancing Quality and Assessment in Learning (EQAL), which ran from 2010 to 2014. The change programme was complex and ambitious and had the potential to create negative outcomes for students if managed poorly. The experience for The Union was on the whole extremely positive. The Union was kept involved in EQAL delivery as committee representatives and members of varied working groups. EQAL delivered new standardised expectations for the undergraduate curriculum and new quality assurance processes at a time of great change on campus and the higher education sector (introduction of £9,000 fees and the introduction and subsequent scrapping of core and margin units). The impact of EQAL has been recognised externally through two awards: The Guardian University Award (Student Experience) in 2013 and the EUNIS Award for Excellence 2014.

The evaluation for the EQAL project was discussed at Student Experience Committee May 2015<sup>6</sup>. The Union were broadly supportive of the EQAL programme. Moodle has been embraced by students and staff and has made it easier for students to access digital information by storing it in one place. Physical hubs across campuses now provide uniform professional face-to-face support for all students. Personalised timetabling allows students to manage their study life balance.

The benefits of standardised expectations for curriculum outcomes has raised the University's delivery overall. A downside to standardisation is the risk to local innovation in teaching and assessment. To move from good to great The Union would welcome a review of the curriculum framework to ensure it allows space for alternative approaches to teaching and assessment that maximise the opportunities for student success across subjects, whilst maintaining the baseline expectations delivered through EQAL.

## 2. How effectively the University has addressed the recommendations of its last review

### 2.1. How are students told or involved in any recommendations from previous review outcomes? Were students

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog\\_committee.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog_committee.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/committees/sec/270515/16B.pdf>



**involved in implementing any changes themselves?**

The inclusion of student representatives in decision making and use of student voice insight to support decision making has increased significantly since the last audit.<sup>7</sup> The partnership between the University and Union has provided The Union with the resources required to grow student support and development for course representatives.<sup>8</sup> In turn, this has allowed the University to make greater use of students and elected officers in areas such as programme committees, academic appeals, and PARM panels. As full members of those committees students are now directly involved in decision making at faculty and institutional level. Not all recommendations of the previous audit required further student representation or support to implement. For example, the introduction of peer support or the inclusion of the institution on collaborative transcripts. Areas where students were involved in responding to the recommendations of the 2009 Audit are discussed below.

**2009 recommendations:**

**The team advises that Manchester Met establishes a set of comprehensive university-wide assessment criteria to help maintain consistent standards across all provision, both on and off-campus.**

**AND**

**That Manchester Met identifies those features of the student learning experience (such as feedback on assessment, assessment information, access to personal tutoring, and handbook content) for which unambiguous requirements must be defined and implemented for the benefit of all students.**

The majority of the recommendations were addressed through the delivery of the EQAL change programme. Student representatives were involved in the formulation and scrutiny of delivery of the EQAL initiatives through committee representation and invitations for union membership of working groups.<sup>9</sup> The reach of EQAL was extensive covering wholesale curriculum redesign with a move away from 15 credit modules, the introduction of Moodle, timetabling and

developments to the library and other resources on campus. Its impact is addressed later in the report.

More recently Manchester Met have integrated the Institutional Code of Practice: Assessment of Students<sup>10</sup> and the Procedures for the Management of Assessment: Assessment Design, Grading, Criteria and Marking<sup>11</sup> into the Transforming Assessment and Feedback for Institutional Change (TRAFFIC) project.

The Union see the introduction of the personalised assessment information for students via Moodle in addition to course handbooks as positive. The University have developed guidance and minimum standards for web and/or paper based handbook content. Students receive all assessment dates and information at the beginning of term and there has been a significant improvement in the way results have been published this academic year by comparison to July 2014 with most students now having access to their personalised results online.<sup>12</sup>

Students' Union officers and staff were involved in various working groups and committees throughout the roll-out of the TRAFFIC project.<sup>13</sup> Students were involved in trialling Moodle and Moodle 2 to ensure they were fit for purpose and student-friendly online spaces. In 2009 statistical analysis of NSS identified that overall satisfaction was strongly influenced by student perceptions of how well organised their course was and focus groups held at the time provided an insight into the types of information students wanted to see in order to consider their course of study to be well organised. This included consistent presentation of online content and a desire for definitive information about hand-in dates, timetables and key reading. Scenarios developed by the institution's Learning and Research Technology (LRT) department were validated by students across faculty roadshow activity which then formed the criteria in the decision making process that selected Moodle in 2010.<sup>14</sup>

Moodle was piloted with the January intake of nursing students who fed into the guidance provided to all staff when Moodle was deployed university-wide in September 2011. Focus groups emphasised that

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment\\_icp.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment_icp.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment\\_procedures.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment_procedures.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Appendix 3: Case study on TRAFFIC – Assessment at MMU

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> <http://lrt.mmu.ac.uk/lrtreview/2010/03/04/outcome-of-learning-technologies-review/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/committees/sec/080513/09A.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Appendix 2: Job Advertisements for the Engagement (formerly Student Voice) Team and <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/committees/sec/080513/09A.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/committees/sec/270515/16B.pdf>

students wanted a seamless, joined-up experience so the University provided convenient access to Moodle via the MyMMU student portal, they also analyse students' comments about Moodle and use them to work with Tutors to make their Moodle areas more effective.<sup>15</sup> In 2012, analysis of the devices students were using showed that access on mobiles was a priority, therefore Manchester Met developed the free MyMMU smartphone app with input from union staff and officers.<sup>16</sup>

When significant new features are added to Moodle or the portal Manchester Met include students and/or representatives from The Union on the project teams. For example, two union officers were members of last year's working group for the online publication of results. The Union's input was highly valued when planning and framing the communication and messaging. The @MyMMU Twitter account (which has over 3,000 followers) is proactively used to collect students' suggestions for new features – this proved useful recently with changes to the look of the student portal to make it more mobile-friendly.

## 2009 Recommendations

**It would be desirable for the University to make more systematic, effective and evident the analysis and use of data in annual monitoring processes.**

Manchester Met rolled out the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI) process in 2011/12, which gives programme teams relevant and up to date information on student satisfaction, attainment and retention. Programme teams now have a dashboard to use as a Continuous Improvement Plan that is updated throughout the academic year. The University run a bi-annual Internal Student Survey (ISS), which provides programme teams with student satisfaction data on the programme of study and on individual units.

Students' Union officers and staff are involved in various different committees and working groups across the institution. CMI plans are discussed at programme committees which course reps attend as part of their role.<sup>17</sup> Students provide feedback through the ISS, NSS, ISB and induction surveys, which feed into the CMI processes as well as attending SSLCs.

## 2009 Recommendations

**The team advises as the University reviews its committee structures, particular attention should be given to the means of securing more effective discharge of the responsibilities of those committees, including maximising attendance at their meetings.**

Manchester Met revised their committee structure to ensure committees were fit for purpose, including review of membership, quoracy and terms of reference. The University further demonstrated its commitment to student focus through the introduction of several initiatives that improved quality and quantity of student representation on committees:

1. Manchester Met avoided the easy option of removing students from committees where they had historically shown poor attendance, and instead introduced a pre-briefing entitlement for student representatives. Students are invited to meet with chairs of committees ahead of any meeting for clarification of any item, and general support.<sup>18</sup>
2. The University agreed to increased student and union representation on several committees during the review ensuring elected sabbatical officers are full members of committees and working groups at every level of decision making across the organisation.
3. Course reps have been added as full members of programme committees, a move welcomed by The Union.<sup>19</sup>
4. In response to The Union's suggestion that there needed to be a committee to deal with the wider student experience, the University introduced the Student Experience Committee.
5. The University has welcomed the addition of key union staff as well as student officers on appropriate committees across the institution to provide expert support and insight. We believe this is unusual in the sector with most universities allowing only elected sabbatical officers to have a place on committees. This demonstrates Manchester Met's commitment to continuous improvement and desire to get the best possible insight to make decisions.

## 2.2. How effective is the University normally in sharing good practice?

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 4: Hearing the Online Student Voice Report

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 5: Case Study on Moodle Trail

<sup>17</sup> Appendix 6: Programme Committee Agenda

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog\\_committee.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog_committee.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog\\_committee.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog_committee.pdf)



Manchester Met strongly promote the sharing of good practice through the use of their Good Practice Exchange.<sup>20</sup> The University's CELT department also run an annual conference to encourage the sharing of best practice and promote innovation across the institution. Students' union staff and officers have been invited to take part in the workshops and often to co-deliver some of the sessions with particular regard to topics such as "Making the most of your Course Reps" for academics across the institution. Officers and CRSS also feed into faculty-level and university-wide committees sharing areas of best practice based on face to face communications, campaigns and events with students.

### 3. How effectively does the University set and maintain the threshold standards of its academic awards?

#### 3.1. Do students see assessment as getting more challenging as they progress through their course?

The Union and Manchester Met run several student surveys, but do not explicitly ask students about whether or not their assessments get more challenging as they progress. The Union and University recently carried out a longitudinal project looking at student experience over three years of study.<sup>21</sup> The project followed the experience of a small group of participants as they completed monthly diaries throughout their study. All participants made reference to the workload increasing and becoming more challenging as the course progressed; particularly the transition from second to third years of study.

#### Second year student:

*"So, second year started with a bang of intense work, nothing like the slow gentle build up of first year; this year everything has been more intense, faster and covered in far more depth. However that's come with the flip side of the option module being far more interesting and moving*

*from pure theory to far more relations to real life applications and how what we are covering relates to employability."*

#### Third year students:

*"Finally the stress of University has landed. A 24 hour contact week not including meetings and tutorials has finally hit me."*

*"October used to be a lot more relaxing,. But as a final year student, October was hell."*

*"They tried warning us how difficult 3rd year would be, but we are BOMBARDED with work."*

The University's PARM panels and review processes exist to ensure that the institution's programmes are pedagogically excellent, meaning that assessments as part of students' programme of study should naturally become more challenging as the level of learning increases. Where appropriate, external examiners are involved in the review processes and have termly input into programme committees and assessment boards. This tracks the level of difficulty as students progress through their academic studies and should be made evident through the use of grading criteria for assessments. The inclusion of student representatives as full members of those panels has given confidence that threshold standards are managed.

The NSS open text includes some comments about assessment methods and tasks being seen to become increasingly more challenging, however students also commented on assessment bunching adding to the pressure and stress of getting work completed rather than the tasks themselves. This may be an indirect consequence of the standardisation of assessment through EQAL. In the previous QAA Review The Union suggested that "MMU should investigate the difficulties with managing a complex assessment period to make sure that communication to students is clear". A significant amount of work has been done to improve timetabling and trying to relieve some of the pressure surrounding assessment bunching to accommodate good study life balance. NSS open text comments however suggest that more work could be done in certain areas to ensure academic staff communicate early with one another about assessment dates to ensure they can be better spaced.

The Humanities, Language and Social Sciences (HLSS) faculty have been highlighted as an area

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/good\\_practice/index.php](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/good_practice/index.php)

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 7: Student Journey Project Spring 2015 Report

of best practice having created a register of units available to students across departments and levels. An Excel spreadsheet makes visible the weeks that were “crowded” to ensure that staff across departments could work together to disperse deadlines more effectively.

## Next Steps

**The Union would like to see other faculties follow the lead of HLSS in ensuring they relieve the stress caused by assessment bunching as much as reasonably possible.**

### 3.2. Do students have access to External Examiner Reports?

Manchester Met’s process on external examining states that “with effect from 2013/14 completed Subject External Examiner reports will be made available to students via their Programme Moodle areas”.<sup>22</sup> The University carried out an internal review of this area. As a result, some adjustments were made to the responsibility for putting reports on Moodle programme areas. Previously it had been the responsibility of programme leaders and compliance had been variable and patchy, so this responsibility has now been devolved to Faculty Quality Enhancement Teams.

The student guidance also states that details of the name, position and workplace of the external examiners appointed for programmes will normally be found on programme Moodle areas and/or in course handbooks. The guidance clearly states that students should not contact their external examiner directly, and particularly not with respect to individual performance in assessment concerns, and directs students to the appropriate procedures.

The institution provide some useful guidance for students on what an external examiner is and the purpose of their role through the Student Hub. However, we do not know how widespread knowledge of the external examining processes is amongst students, or how often discussions on them take place between programme staff and students.<sup>23</sup> Despite the outline of a clear process, anecdotal

evidence suggests that student awareness of external examiner reports in practice is currently inconsistent.

External examiner reports are considered at programme committees in the first term, which include all teaching staff on the programme and course representatives as full members of the committee. In order for programme committees to be quorate, 50% of their membership must be in attendance. Although these are discussed at programme committees with course reps in attendance, The Union suggests that wider conversations happen with whole cohorts of students to ensure all students understand the process and are aware that reports are available on Moodle.

Manchester Met have done a lot of work in providing guidance for the involvement of students and course reps in quality and enhancement processes.<sup>24</sup> We would like to see this extended so that all students are more thoroughly involved in the external examiner process in order to increase their understanding of it. This could be achieved through academic staff setting aside some time to explain the process of external examining and how to access the reports, as well as allowing the opportunity for course representatives to meet with their external examiners through the programme committees where they are discussed.

## Next Steps

**There should be consistency in the communication and online availability of external examiner reports, with academic staff actively explaining the process of external examining to students and sign-posting them to the reports. This availability should be monitored by faculties and presented at the appropriate committee. The Union also suggests that Manchester Met should consider the opportunity for students and external examiners to meet and there should be parity on the process across all faculties.**

### 3.3. Do students feel that their assessments are appropriate?

Improvement in the assessment and feedback bank of questions of the NSS since the last review highlights a clear improvement in student satisfaction with assessments overall. Results are now strong at 76% and are ahead of the sector at 73%. The University has put resource into improving this. However, it is worth noting that despite the increase Manchester Met have

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/examiners/docs/EE\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/examiners/docs/EE_Overview.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/examiners/student-overview.php>

<sup>24</sup> Appendix 8: TRAFFIC Project Plan and [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog\\_committee.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/prog_committee.pdf)

seen compared to 2010 (63%), for much of this period the University has been behind the sector average.<sup>25</sup>

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
MMU	63	63	69	71	72	76
Sector	66	67	70	71	72	73

The NSS data above is not a direct representation of how appropriate the assessments are but an aggregate of several questions on how clear, fair, prompt, and detailed assessment and feedback are. A review of the comments from the NSS on the appropriateness of assessments centred around the topic of group work. Although some students made positive comments about the group work tasks these were far outweighed by comments of dissatisfaction. Issues raised were mainly concerning grade percentage weighting of group work tasks and clarity of marking in relation to individual inputs. Whilst recognising that this is good experience for the real world, The Union would like to see an extension to the numbers of permitted assessments to reduce the impact of group work.

## Next Steps

**The Union believes there should be more frequent forms of formative assessment that also provide real world experience, in order to reduce reliance on major pieces of group course work whilst maintaining a strong link to employability. This could include shorter placement opportunities, the creation of individual blogs, guest lectures and access to industry professionals throughout students' time of study.**

Likewise in the PTES, students are not directly asked about the appropriateness of their assessments. In relation to fairness of assessment arrangements and marking the percentage satisfaction score is 72% (slightly lower than the post-92 sector average and a slight decrease from Manchester Met's 74% 2012 scoring on the same question).

As an example of best practice in the academic year 2014/15, Social Care students taking the unit Communication, Activism and Social Change were given innovative assessments in the format of a blog. Students created, developed and managed the blog. Students were assessed on their individual blogs, which all fed into an overall group blog feed. Students reported that the assessment was an interesting alternative to the usual presentations, essays and exams format which allowed for individual

development as well as peer support/learning. This form of assessment received positive feedback from students as they felt they could track their continuous development throughout the academic year and gain skills that could be used in future employment, including developing and managing a campaign and a blog.

## Next Steps

**The Union would like to see more creative use of assessment formats and feedback across the institution.**

### 3.4. Do students feel that their feedback is timely and helpful?

Since the last review in 2009 we have seen gradual improvements in NSS scores for Assessment and Feedback, with the overall score for this section increasing by 9%. There are notable improvements in the promptness of feedback (18% increase) and students receiving detailed comments (7% increase).

The Union have worked in partnership with the University on issues of assessment and feedback. We have run student-led Teaching Awards for five years and have introduced an award for Outstanding Feedback to emphasise to teaching staff the importance of constructive and timely feedback for students' progression. In the previous QAA review, The Union recommended that "MMU should agree a threshold standard for the prompt return of feedback and establish a system to monitor whether this is adhered to". The University have since agreed and implemented a four-week turnaround for feedback, which is reflected in an increase in NSS rating on promptness. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that some students don't fully understand what constitutes feedback or what type of feedback to expect within the four-week time frame, for example whether it should be verbal or written.

Feedback plans are included in the indicative assessment briefs available on the CELT website. However, The Union are unsure about the extent to which these are used because, anecdotally, some students have stated that they do not receive this information as part of their assignment brief.<sup>26</sup> As a result, The Union suggests that more work needs to be done to communicate and manage students' expectations in relation to the various types of feedback they receive. This is particularly significant in

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 9: SPMI NSS Graphs

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/lifecycle/2\\_setting.php](http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/lifecycle/2_setting.php)

relation to exam feedback because there is no formal procedure in place.

Using student feedback to demonstrate the extent to which the University is meeting the assessment feedback requirements is useful and allows engagement with students on the issue. The Union does not receive a significant number of complaints from students and the NSS shows improvement in this area. However, it is possible that this is due to lack of awareness of assessment feedback minimum standards and expectations. Increased communication of the University's four-week commitment would help to rule this out.

The Union welcomes the addition of adherence to the four-week turnaround as a KPI to be reported to Faculty Executive Group (FEG). This will highlight areas of good practice across the institution and will allow the University to identify areas where staff may need extra support to meet the four-week expectation. Online feedback could be used to help communicate information to students in a timely fashion and to monitor the timeliness of the return of feedback across the board.

The introduction of the In Year Assignment Recovery Scheme (IYARS) is positive and has the potential to greatly support student success. The Union Advice Centre has been included in the IYARS working group and has had the opportunity to contribute comments from students and advisers. The Union supports the scheme as a development tool for Level 4 students to be able to submit an assignment and receive feedback in the usual way, with the opportunity to resubmit within a month using this feedback to improve on their marks if the first attempt was failed. When compared to resitting assessments several months later during the resit period, this system is particularly beneficial for students who are new to higher education because the content will still be fresh in their minds. This scheme is an example of good practice in terms of students being able to use prompt and constructive feedback in order to progress academically.

Initial data from its first year suggested that approximately 29% of eligible assignments had been resubmitted through the scheme. Some excellent marks were being achieved amongst those that were originally non-submissions. There was some variation in the take-up of the scheme between faculties, with the strongest engagement from students in the Faculty of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences (HLSS). The Union retains some concerns about the project with regards to student workload. If a student fails and resubmits under the IYARS but has already

passed the unit overall at 40% when the Assessment Board meet (using the other elements of the unit) then the early re-sit may have been in vain. However, it still helps the student in terms of being able to meet the intended learning outcomes the assessments are designed to meet. Although this could have some disadvantages in terms of resubmitting amended work when the module has already been passed, the benefits to progression and development far outweigh any potential disadvantages.

Manchester Met perform slightly below the benchmark group (post-92 institutions) on the PTES survey for postgraduate taught students on the feedback questions. Around a third (64%) of participants in the 2015 survey agreed that feedback on their work was prompt (3% lower than the benchmarking group) and 70% agreed that it was useful (4% lower than the benchmark group). While promptness of feedback showed steady improvements from 2010 to 2014 (reflective of the introduction of the four-week turnaround commitment), satisfaction in this area fell in the most recent survey. Ratings for the usefulness of feedback remained consistent with the score received in 2014. PTES results over the past couple of years indicate that Manchester Met has not performed quite as well at taught postgraduate level as it has at undergraduate level. We are not sure if this is an anomaly and we will work with the University to identify and resolve any issues.

In terms of future developments, The Union welcomes any improvements to the way that the benefits of feedback are embedded into the academic programme and the way students are assisted in using their feedback constructively to develop learning. We have seen an increase of 10% since 2009 in the NSS question "Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand". However, The Union suggests that more emphasis be put on improving how students use their feedback to advance in future assessments.

## Next Steps

**Continue commitment to assessment and feedback on in-unit assessments within four weeks, putting measures in place to ensure this happens. Further work should take place to manage student expectation about feedback types, amount, delivery and advice on how to use this feedback to improve academically at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There should also be a tracker in place that is presented termly to the appropriate University committee to ensure that all students**



receive their feedback within the guaranteed four-week period.

### 3.5. Do students understand grading criteria?

The University's guidance on the setting of assessments states that each assignment should include an assignment brief. Manchester Met's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) provide indicative assignment briefs and online content for teaching staff to use in order to set assignments at the standard expected across the institution. Part of the assignment brief includes the explanation of grading criteria and how students' work will be marked<sup>27</sup>.

In the question "The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance" in the NSS, the University have improved from 69% in 2009 to 80% in 2015, which places them ahead of the sector average of 77%. At only 0.5% behind the benchmark group, the University's position in this area relative to the post-92 sector is the best it has ever been in the PTES survey. This mirrors the institution's improvement in the 2015 NSS and shows that Manchester Met's efforts in this particular area of assessment and feedback are having a positive impact. However, students in certain areas still comment in open text survey responses that grading criteria is confusing or that they are not aware of the criteria that they are being marked against, suggesting some inconsistency in the use of University guidance by staff. This is not a widespread issue and may be resolved with some personalised academic support in lower performing areas.

In the 2015 PRES survey Manchester Met scored 73% in the question "The final assessment procedures for my degree are clear to me", which is above the sector average, and 80% in the question "I understand the required standard for my thesis", which is slightly below the sector average. These scores suggest that postgraduate research students at Manchester Met are generally clear on the assessment tasks and requirements.

### Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met continue the good work that has gone into ensuring that students are aware of grading criteria, and make the use of templates clearly stating grading criteria**

compulsory for each piece of assessed work across the institution.

### 3.6. Are students aware of the University rules on plagiarism and academic misconduct?

Manchester Met's *Procedure for the Communication of Assessment Arrangements*<sup>28</sup> states that an assignment brief must be provided to students for each coursework assignment task. This will normally be included in the unit handbook and should include submission instructions, list of task details and any instructions such as referencing or technical requirements, information about any penalties for overlong submissions, and support arrangements. These are made available to students along with dates of exam weeks at the beginning of the unit through programme Moodle areas and unit handbooks.

The University has reviewed its online hub to ensure students have access to all essential information including University rules on plagiarism and academic misconduct. As part of its review, the University enlisted the support of The Union's professional advisers to user-test the hub. All letters sent to students relating to alleged academic misconduct include a referral to The Union's independent and impartial Advice Centre.

The number of students visiting The Union's Advice Centre with plagiarism and academic misconduct issues increased by 100% from 2013/14 to 2014/15. This does not necessarily mean there has been a significant rise in the numbers of students going through academic misconduct procedures. The increase could be attributed to a variety of improvements, including the inclusion of Advice Centre contact details on all letters from faculties, better referrals to the Advice Centre from student support officers, the introduction of Turnitin, and tutors being more aware of the procedures and actions they should take if they suspect plagiarism. Anecdotally, it appears that in the past tutors may have spoken to students informally and not forwarded the case through the appropriate channels if they suspected it was poor referencing rather than intentional plagiarism. The CELT website includes

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment\\_arrangements.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment_arrangements.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment\\_arrangements.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/assessment_arrangements.pdf)

some really useful guides for staff to use with regards to plagiarism and academic misconduct.<sup>29</sup>

Manchester Met operates a standard referencing convention (Harvard) including useful online referencing support packages across most of its courses.<sup>30</sup> Students studying Law use OSCOLA, the School of Art accept either Numeric or Harvard and HLSS use Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) for History, English, Philosophy and Public Services. There are guides for each of these styles of referencing<sup>31</sup>. The Union's only area of concern is ensuring that students who study joint programmes are provided with a high level of support if they are required to use multiple referencing guides. Over 2,000 academics used Turnitin in 2014/15. Just over 85,000 submissions were made by approximately 34,000 students across 1,000 units. The Turnitin percentage similarity reports are only one of the tools used to determine if academic misconduct has taken place, but data suggests that a very small proportion of the submissions to Turnitin are reported with high percentage similarities. This could suggest that students using the system independently for formative purposes and making use of the originality reports function to evaluate the quality of their writing and referencing techniques are less likely to fall foul of academic misconduct. Assessment strategies that are based on formative engagement with students while they are working on their submissions are a better way to head off plagiarism issues than simply using Turnitin on completed assignments. Members of the University's learning innovation team work with academic colleagues to encourage students to use Turnitin independently for formative purposes to look at originality reports and an interesting case study is available at: <http://lrl.mmu.ac.uk/li/case-study/using-turnitin-for-formative-assessment/>

In terms of assessment regulations and academic impropriety, Manchester Met have developed a very progressive tiered system which applies different levels of sanction based on levels of academic experience. The University invite full representation from sabbatical officers and key advice staff during any amendment to the regulations. The system is supportive of students' learning and allows students to progress their academic writing within a structure

that has been noted across the higher education sector as an example of good practice.

### 3.7. How does the University ensure students are made aware of any changes to academic regulations?

The Union have some concerns about the impact of union and university communications on changes to academic regulations. There appear to have been some instances whereby key messages may not have been fully understood by students. One example which highlights these concerns relates to the removal of the two week assessment extension period from September 2014. Despite considerable support from The Union in digital communications, roadshow events conducted in person around campus revealed that many students were unaware of the imminent changes with some stating they had assignments due that week with no information from their tutors about the changes to assessment regulations and how they could be affected. Another example concerns the discontinuation of the IYARS for level five students. The Union dealt with two appeals cases in the first year of the project due to students thinking they could use the same scheme when they couldn't. The Union raised this in the Annual Review of Assessment Regulations on 22 October 2015 and learnt that no formal communications plan had been written given that students may already be preparing for their first term assessments.

As stated in the January 2015 Student Voice Report, The Union will continue to commit resource and work with the University to communicate certain key messages that may well affect students' usual study conventions, in a unique style to complement the University's communications. The Union may choose to complement these messages via our own communications with students at particularly important times, however, it is ultimately the institution's responsibility to ensure they develop a robust central and local communications system which can be easily monitored, reported to the appropriate committee, and doesn't over rely on academic staff or The Union to pass messages to students.

### Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met revise the central student communications plan for changes to academic regulations. This should include various forms of communication and rely less on academic**

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/plagiarism/index.php>

<sup>30</sup> <http://libguides.mmu.ac.uk/c.php?g=281251&p=1873940>

<sup>31</sup> <http://libguides.mmu.ac.uk/c.php?g=281251&p=1873940>



staff and The Union to filter the message to individual cohorts.

### 3.8. How are students involved in the design of their own curriculum?

In May 2014 the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) approved student membership of faculty-based PARM panels. Student members of PARM panels were recruited and trained in October 2014 for the 2014/15 pilot. A successful evaluation of the pilot in May 2015 resulted in the AQSC approving the continuation of student membership of PARM for all provision that is delivered on University premises. The Union congratulate Manchester Met on leading best practice by paying students as panel members to ensure students are seen as genuine partners whose input is appreciated on the panel. CASQE and The Union were actioned to consider the feasibility of student membership of panels held on partner organisation premises with a view to implementation from 2015/16 if the practical arrangements do not preclude it. The AQSC also tasked CASQE and The Union to work with faculties to develop the training provided for student panel members in line with suggestions made by student members. One of the suggestions was for specific additional training for those events that are run jointly with a professional body.

Comments from students about the aspects of the role they found to be enjoyable included<sup>32</sup>:

*"The importance of the role the student voice plays with regards to course structure and academic feedback."*

*"All administrative staff have been amazing at sending the information across in plenty of time, keeping in contact via email with any changes or queries, and all panels I have attended have been ran extremely efficiently."*

Feedback from staff included comments such as:

*"I have found the inclusion of student reps to be a very positive impact on the PARM process. Both students were confident in their role and were confident in speaking*

*both within the private panel meetings and also during the student/programme team meetings. Both student reps raised items from a student perspective and in some instances this led to conditions/recommendations that may otherwise have been missed."* (Faculty Quality Administrators)

There are pockets of good practice across the institution, with informal links being forged through events and workshops held by both Manchester Met and The Union regarding student involvement in course design. However, this does not demonstrate how students can actively be involved at a programme level. CELT have previously delivered sessions at various training and development events for course reps. CELT and The Union were involved in a Higher Education Academy (HEA) project in 2012/13 to develop student engagement in curriculum change as part of the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The joint report is available on the HEA website<sup>33</sup> and one of the main outcomes was that the University needed to provide more support to course reps and programme teams to develop partnership. In 2015/16 the University are planning to work with sabbatical officers and course rep support staff in Cheshire to develop links with programmes that are being reviewed. The broad plan is to look at different course design models and ask students for their views, and this work will begin when enough reviews have been planned. The Union believes that Manchester Met's plan to move from student consultation to student participation and genuine partnership in curriculum design is extremely positive and reflective of a wider national trend. However, we are also aware that this is an extensive, longer-term piece of work that will require a culture shift across the institution. While we see this as a positive move, it is important to note that it is not currently an issue high on most students' agendas. This could be because co-design of courses is not currently widespread so most students do not begin university with that expectation in mind.

### Next Steps

**Manchester Met and The Union should continue to work in partnership recruiting and training student members of PARM panels. The introduction of students as full members on the panels is a positive move, however more work needs to be done to ensure that there is genuine student involvement**

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/event/docs/students-Faculty-PARM-events.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/sap\\_1213\\_programme\\_compendium.docx](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/sap_1213_programme_compendium.docx)

in curriculum design leading to the review panel rather than just at the panel itself. This would further recognise students as experts in HE by experience.

## 4. Learning opportunities

### 4.1. Do students feel that the staff are fully trained and qualified?

The 2013/14 HEPI/HEA Student Academic Experience Survey included for the first time questions on how students rate the importance of training for those who teach in higher education. The survey received 15,129 responses from across the sector. Just over one in ten (12%) respondents stated that they felt their expectations of their course had not been met, 29% of whom stated "The teaching quality was worse than I expected" as the reason. Over a third (29%) of respondents ranked "They have received training in how to teach" as the most important characteristic of teaching staff. This data shows that students feel that trained and qualified teaching staff play a key role in satisfaction with the overall course. HEPI and HEA have recommended that institutions should make this a priority and that information on teaching staff holding teaching qualifications should be incorporated into a revamped Key Information Set (KIS).<sup>34</sup>

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collected data on teaching qualifications held by staff for the first time in 2014. Responses revealed that across the higher education sector institutions do not hold this information for over 50% of relevant staff. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) therefore delayed the publication of sector level information until there is a robust data set in place.

Manchester Met's AQSC received a paper in October 2015 that discussed the government's plans to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to give teaching the same status as research. The paper also discussed the expectation that all new teaching staff at the University are expected to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) within three years of starting, as well as the expectation that those staff teaching at collaborative partner institutions complete the first unit of the PGCAP by the end of the first year of the partnership. The Union congratulate CELT on their revised, redeveloped and more flexible offering to

academic staff, which resulted in a 220% increase in the number of staff registering for the postgraduate certificate from the 2012/13 to 2013/14 academic year. Manchester Met are also committed to professional development in terms of ensuring that all teaching staff are either already trained or are aiming to undertake postgraduate research qualifications in order to be able to support students at all levels of teaching as well as to become leading researchers within their field. Peer review and peer support are also strong mechanisms for staff to share best practice for teaching and classroom management. Manchester Met are increasingly using these mechanisms, but they could be rolled out further across the institution.

We do not currently ask students directly about their opinions on staff being fully trained and qualified, however there is evidence to suggest a relatively high level of satisfaction with teaching. In the 2015 NSS Manchester Met scored an 85% satisfaction rate for 'teaching on my course' which is only slightly below the sector average of 87%. The University scored 82% satisfaction for academic support, which is level with the sector average. Across both NSS question categories the sector has shown gradual but steady improvement from 2010 to 2015. Manchester Met has also shown improvement throughout this period although at a better rate so that the gap to the sector has narrowed since 2010. The following table includes statistics for trend information.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Teaching MMU	79	78	81	84	83	85
Teaching Sector	84	85	86	86	87	87
Academic support MMU	70	70	76	79	79	82
Academic support Sector	75	77	79	80	81	82

Although these questions are not directly comparable, they do indicate that students feel their academic staff are delivering a high standard of teaching.

### Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met continues to demonstrate its commitment to professional development for all staff who teach at both the University and collaborative partners. It is also recommended that robust data be collected and maintained in terms of teaching staff who hold a qualification, or who are working towards one,**

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AS-PRINTED-HEA-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-Report\\_PRINT3.pdf](http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/AS-PRINTED-HEA-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-Report_PRINT3.pdf)

to be included in promotional literature such as website content, online prospectus materials and Key Information Sets moving forward.

#### 4.2. Have students had the opportunity to feedback on lectures?

Manchester Met's Internal Student Survey (ISS) surveys students at both a programme and unit level allowing for feedback on individual units. There is an opportunity for students to make open text comments and programme teams use this feedback to inform their continuous improvement plans using the institution's new Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI) dashboard. All students are invited to Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC) once per term with feedback then being taken by the elected Course Rep, acting as a conduit for course based feedback from all students, to Programme Committees. The Union's only concern about the current system is that it is relatively new. The SSLCs were opened up to all students two years ago so it is unclear how widespread knowledge of them is amongst students.

An example of good practice is Manchester Law School's monthly 'town hall'-style meetings. This involves 15 minutes at the end of core unit lectures being set aside for students to raise any issues with the programme leader, who then reports back to them on progress at the same time the following week. Another example is the provision of such information to students on Powerpoint slides at the end of appropriate lectures.<sup>35</sup>

There are undoubtedly effective mechanisms for the collection of lecture feedback being used across the institution, although students are not always aware of changes which have happened as a result of their feedback. There does not appear to be much evidence that students are made aware of these changes. There are pockets of "You said, we did" activities across some faculties, however this is not consistently applied across the institution and doesn't appear to reflect the volume of feedback provided by students at times.

#### 4.3. Do students see evidence of a link between research undertaken by lecturers and the content of the units?

Through the multiple surveys used at Manchester Met, students are never directly asked about their lecturers' research and whether or not this is linked to the content of their units. There were a number of positive examples included in the 2015 NSS open text comments, however this anecdotal feedback does not give equal weight to any potential negative sentiment around this.

#### 4.4. Do students believe that the learning resources are adequate?

In 2015 Manchester Met scored 85% for learning resources overall in the NSS, which is a 1% increase on the previous year and a steady increase from 76% in 2011. This trend is consistent for library resources, IT resources and specialised equipment. The University are now 1% below sector average (86%) but have been consistently (although slightly) below sector average since 2010. The University saw increases in the PTES scores relating to resources, with library resources moving from 71% in 2010 to 84% in 2014 and IT resources improving from 73% to 83%. Course specific resources was a new question added in 2014 to the PTES set of questions and Manchester Met scored 77% agreement from PGT students.

Manchester Met's ten year £350 million estates investment project shows a continued commitment to facilities and resources for students. Since the 2009 Institutional Audit there has been continual transformation and modernisation with the move to a two-campus institution. The 2014 consolidation of the Didsbury and Elizabeth Gaskell campuses into the new £140 million Birley campus in Manchester has seen some adjustment issues, as would be expected with any new building project. However, anecdotally the overall response from students appears to be positive. At a pre-reg nursing SSLC in October 2015 and other various fora, students raised concerns about the lack of library resources and a shortage of computer spaces in the Brooks Building on the Birley campus. As a result of this feedback the University IT team have installed an extra 34 PCs in the building and Library Services are working to continually improve the online provision and resources for these students. The University's webpage on the investment outlines each of the key new areas of development with regard to campus facilities.<sup>36</sup>

The Cheshire campus has seen some capital investment, including a £6 million Contemporary Arts

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/evaluation\\_of\\_opinion.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/evaluation_of_opinion.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about/investment/>

Centre in 2009 and a £10 million Exercise and Sports Science Centre in 2010. However, when compared to the £267 million investment in Manchester since the last review, it is reasonable to presume that this apparent disinvestment in the campus and its facilities has contributed to a lower intake of students in recent years.

In the 2009 QAA Review, The Union recommended that Manchester Met ensure that the management of resources supports access for non-full-time undergraduate students when they are able to learn. The Union welcomed the major refurbishment of the Sir Kenneth Green Library on the All Saints Campus to enable the library to cater for an increased number of students and to embed 24/7 into its regular opening hours for most of the academic year. At the Cheshire campus, 24/7 library opening times was trialled in 2013 using contract security. Due to low levels of usage, the institution decided it would be more cost-effective and sustainable to open until midnight six days a week throughout term time and invest in improving electronic resources that can be accessed from any location at a time to suit the individual. The library also has extended holiday opening hours across the Easter and Summer vacation to accommodate students on different modes of study.

The introduction of Moodle in 2011, and its subsequent development into a mobile-friendly platform the following year, has allowed off campus, non-traditional students greater access to personalised resources at a time that suits them. There are also dedicated LRT staff linked to each faculty who deliver training and guidance to staff on the accessibility of resources and the minimum standards expected across the institution.

The above developments show a commitment from the institution to improve resources and the success of this investment can be seen through the continuous improvement of scores on learning resources in various satisfaction surveys. More recently, as a result of student feedback through programme committees and course reps, late evening opening of specialist workshops is now available four nights a week in the Manchester School of Art, supported by technical services staff in Faculty Student and Academic Services. Many areas now open until 18:00 and some open until 20:00. This has led to increased access to technical facilities totalling 191 hours per week. Similar late evening access is offered two evenings per week in the Hollings apparel studios and we hope

these improvements will help to continue Manchester Met's successful growth in student satisfaction.

In May 2015, the Student Experience Committee passed a report stating that Faculty Student Academic Services (SAS) Technical Services, in collaboration with IT Services, will be undertaking a further review of IT support across the University. The review will aim to re-define roles and responsibilities, eliminate duplication and enhance service delivery, particularly for students, who will eventually be able to access specialist software from any PC within the University. Currently, access to specialised software is restricted to PCs within specialist areas. The review aims to establish a consistent infrastructure to support routine frontline services and free up specialist IT Technical support to focus on supporting research and teaching and learning.

We will continue to monitor the changes and cultural shift on the Birley campus. We would like to see the University continually being proactive in ensuring students have access to resources. Library provision across the HE sector has changed rapidly in recent years with a cultural shift towards commitment in building online resources in order to meet the expectations of various different student groups. It is important that measures are in place to ensure student needs are taken into account, as the availability of resources is one of the few things that is indicative of the experience at a particular institution. Libraries are often seen as flagship resources and therefore need to be accessible and relatable to a very diverse student body. Linked to comments made in other parts of the document, the availability and continuous development of access to learning resources should form part of the institution's central and local communications plans to students to ensure they are aware of the wealth of resource available to them throughout their student journey.

#### **4.5. How are students involved in quality assurance processes at all levels?**

Currently there is Students' Union representation on every level of decision making across the institution. Sabbatical officers are members of Board of Governors, Academic Board, Student Experience Committee, Academic Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Ethics Committee. At faculty level, sabbatical officers and course rep support staff sit on Faculty Student Experience Committees (FSEC) and Faculty Academic Quality and Standards Committees (FAQSC). Course reps attend Programme Committees and all students have the opportunity to



contribute to their programme's Staff Student Liaison Committees.

In response to a Student Voice Review recommendation in 2012/13, the membership of the University's Student Evaluation Strategy Committee, which is comprised of both staff and student representatives, was widened to encompass all aspects of the student experience.

The Programme Committee Review in 2013/14 also introduced a number of enhancements including a completely revised and refreshed terms of reference, and specific associated guidance for the first time for chairs. There is now greater use of informal Staff Student Liaison Committees across faculties to complement the role of the Programme Committees and to be open to all students, not just Course Representatives. The Union welcomed the introduction of course reps as full members of the Programme Committee and the introduction of a 50% quoracy requirement for the meeting.

The University has a strong culture of student representation on committees and groups, ensuring that student representatives have access to senior staff across the institution, including the Vice Chancellor. Manchester Met's Committee Handbook and Programme Committee Guidance also make explicit that student representatives are entitled to a briefing/discussion with the Chair to help them prepare for attendance at meetings.

#### 4.6. How effective is student representation? How are they supported?

The Union recommended in 2009 that "MMU and The Union should set and meet challenging targets for the operational aspects of the student voice system, such as recruitment numbers, training uptake and feedback on actions, and take pride in communicating the benefits of student feedback to the institution."

In May 2015, The Union conducted an online survey among student volunteers, including course reps, to ask them about their experiences of their role. The Union had contact details for 693 course reps and received 138 responses (20% response rate, an increase of 13% since last academic year). The table on the right includes some of the results from course reps on how they felt they were supported with the role and the impact they have made as a result.

Just under three quarters (72%) of course reps surveyed stated that they had used a Programme

Satisfied with the overall experience of volunteering	84%
The role had a positive impact on my university experience	77%
I would recommend the role to others	68%
The experience of volunteering has met or exceeded my original goals (such as helping to develop course, improving my CV and developing my skills)	82%
Agree or strongly agree that they felt appreciated by people on their course	64%
Felt their programme leader had a good understanding of the role	93%
Felt their other academic staff had a good understanding of the role	85%
Agree or strongly agree that they worked well in partnership with academic staff to enhance the learning experience	84%

Committee to raise issues on behalf of other students. Of these, 94% felt that this channel was fairly effective or very effective. Over half of course reps surveyed (51%) had used a Student Staff Liaison Committee. Over a quarter (26%) of course reps surveyed used a student shout out and the majority felt that this channel was fairly effective or very effective.

Suggested improvements to the Academic Representation System included earlier knowledge about who was chosen to be a course rep, more involvement and more focus from The Union and faculty staff members, more networking opportunities with other course reps and more explicit training for the role.

*"My experience as a Course Rep has exceeded my expectations, I feel extremely involved in The Union and that my opinions and ideas have been taken into account and put into practice in order to make my course better."* The Union Volunteering Survey 2015

*"It enhanced my university experience as I felt like my contribution was making a difference and keeping me involved. It gave me a working insight into how decisions and changes are made."* The Union Volunteering Survey 2015

*"It has given me confidence, leadership skills and ability to work with others. It's been a great experience."* The Union Volunteering Survey 2015.

As a result of feedback received from students, The Union and Manchester Met have worked closely to develop online and face-to-face course rep training. In October 2015, The Union held the first ever training conference for course reps to replace a series of workshops delivered across a longer period of time. The conference worked well and attracted a good number of delegates; 163 course reps attended the Manchester event and 12 reps attended in Cheshire. In response to course rep requests for more training and development opportunities, The Union added a development day in December alongside planned development sessions in February and our Course Rep Conference in March.

Manchester Met's commitment to the development of academic representation and support is evidenced by an increase in grant funding for this area of work. The Union's engagement team has introduced and

developed termly Student Voice Reports, which include key feedback from students. They are considered by the institution at a senior level via Manchester Met's committee structure, often resulting in action plans detailing improvements by the University.

The Union have been working closely with CASQE to ensure that our training is representative of the needs of our diverse student body. Distance learning course reps fed back to say that the online training was focussed too heavily on attendance at face-to-face meetings and therefore didn't really apply to them. As a result, we have developed bespoke distance learning training for this academic year. The Union have recently started working with the Graduate School to investigate how we can support post graduate research representation because this is an underdeveloped area of our work.

We have seen significant progress in recent years across the recruitment, training and development of course reps so the core focus now is to continue to work collaboratively with the institution to appropriately capture and report positive stories of changes made by course reps. Increased involvement in co-curricular design may contribute to this.

#### **4.7. Are there any case studies where the University has instigated a change in response to students' views?**

The University has demonstrated its interest in improving the experience of students in its response to student campaigns, formal committee representation and issues raised at informal groups. This positive dialogue has resulted in some significant improvements for students:

- The introduction of the University Ethical Procurement policy was the result of lobbying by students to change its waste collection firm
  - Extended opening of the Library in Manchester and Cheshire during exam times. Subsequent 24-7-365 library access in Manchester followed student feedback presented by The Union
  - Wifi in halls of residence was put in place following informal brainstorming about how to improve student living between The Union and University
  - The University agreed to include and mark Halal foods across its campus following feedback from Muslim students
  - The University accommodated requests for early timetable access for students in the summer.
-



This project has developed over the last five years, with over 30,000 individualised timetables being delivered ahead of the start of term this September.

- A review of costs that students felt should be part of their course entitlement, but were being funded by students themselves, resulted in agreement by the University to fund an additional £3 million pounds of costs, including costs for materials, work wear, placements and essential trips.

The Union's Student Voice Reports are evidence-based and are presented to Academic Board as a development tool to show areas where students feel the University could make improvements. Each of the reports includes recommendations for improvement.

More recently, the University have produced parallel reports detailing the responsive action that will be taken to address concerns raised in the reports. This has helped to address many of the recommendations, including:

- Setting the curriculum timeline to achieve four-week feedback across the University
- Review of the university-wide communication policy to ensure email is being appropriately implemented
- Students used as experts by experience in the development of Moodle 2
- Review of the ebooks collection across the institution to improve course selection
- Continuing to include Advice Centre information to all results letters to students including those who have failed and have no further re-sit opportunities
- Student Voice review to place greater emphasis on student contributions and broadening the remit of committees
- Continuing to work with The Union to extend the range of products and services available on the Met Card to ensure maximum benefit for students
- Faculties working with The Union to promote and develop academic societies as a way of applying learning and building social relationships.

Each year course reps feedback their successes to The Union. The Union are currently working on a more robust system for course reps to collate their successes and have improved the website to include an impact box to make the process as simple as

possible. Some of the positive changes made because of student views at faculty level in 2014 include:

- Extra study skills sessions
- More computers being installed in student resource areas
- Lockers being installed for students to use in the Geoffrey Manton building
- Changes to forms of assessment based on student feedback
- Extended opening hours in the School of Art.

#### **4.8. How does the University use evidence such as the National Student Survey scores to enhance its provision?**

The University acts on a wide range of data sources beyond the NSS, including insight generated by The Union such as the Induction Survey. Use of data has become more and more sophisticated over the lifetime of the NSS and forms a key part of faculty performance measurement.

CMI now allows real time course monitoring, so staff can respond in year to changing satisfaction trends. The targeted improvement programme has supported staff whose students have reported low satisfaction in developing and implementing improvement action plans. The Union was involved in the recent TRAFFIC programme, which has seen improvement to feedback and assessment across the University. Developments in online resources and library improvements have been made in response to survey data.

The Union can say with confidence that the University uses student insight to inform its enhancement activity. The Union sits on University committees where institutional responses to all surveys are considered. The main committee for this was the Student Evaluation Strategy Committee, which reports to the Student Experience Committee (SEC). However, since November 2014 this has been done directly by the SEC. University-wide enhancement actions are included in the Student Surveys Enhancement Plan, which is available on the CASQE website.<sup>37</sup>

The University provides a sophisticated breakdown of the NSS data to a wide range of stakeholders including all staff, University Governors, Committee

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice.php>

members and the Students' Union. Data includes NSS raw data by course, department and institution and is disseminated by CASQE. SPMI also provide further analysis.<sup>38</sup>

There is strong evidence that staff use insight to improve student experience. Local responses to all survey results are made through the CMI process and are available on the CASQE website.<sup>39</sup> Section four of the process lists Student Voice data as a very prominent component of the CMI evidence base. Local enhancement actions by programme teams then feed directly into programme-level Continuous Improvement Plans (CIP) and (if appropriate) Unit Improvement Plans. The CIP is considered and approved at each Programme Committee meeting, whose terms of reference include similar prominence for the need to scrutinise Student Voice data, including survey results.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.9. How do students find out about complaints and appeals procedures?

Students can find out about the complaints and appeals procedure on the university website on the Student Hub, in their course handbook and through staff guidance. Two booklets were produced in June 2015 informing students of the revised complaints and appeals procedures.<sup>41</sup>

Appeals are also mentioned in several other relevant student pages.<sup>42</sup> Appeals have previously been mentioned on results letters however, since the distribution of results moved to Moodle, there is now a link to 'what happens next' on the Moodle page where the Appeals Process is discussed. The University has reviewed its online hub to ensure students have access to all essential information including information on the procedure for complaints and appeals. As with the procedures on plagiarism and academic misconduct all letters sent to students relating to alleged academic misconduct include a

referral to The Union's independent and impartial Advice Centre.

We do not believe that any students involved in complaints and appeals are asked tracking questions. We think it would be useful to monitor 'how students heard' about the complaints and appeals processes at the time of complaint or appeal to identify frequently used routes.

#### 4.10. How satisfied are students with the outcome and timescales of the above procedures?

In 2011 academic year Manchester Met started a review of the Academic Appeals process as they had previously had a significantly higher number of appeals per 1,000 students than other peer institutions. This large proportion of appeals meant staff were being stretched to provide appropriate support, meaning that appeals were often taking a long time to be processed.

In academic year 2012/13 there was a very significant reduction in the total number of appeals submitted at Stage 1 and Stage 2, which appears to coincide with the roll-out to level 5 of the EQAL curriculum, adjustments that were made to aspects of appeals and the introduction of HEFCE engagement rules.

Academic Year	Number of 1st Stage Appeals	Number of 2nd Stage Appeals
2009/10	777	158
2010/11	969	241
2011/12	922	158
2012/13	556	103
2013/14	629	188

The Union see changes made to the complaints procedure in Summer 2015 as positive for students, especially as there is a focus on early resolution where possible. To support early resolution the University have introduced trained mediators to ensure complaints are dealt with impartially and promptly.

Previously, formal complaints were dealt with by a Head of Department at the first stage and the Dean of Faculty at the second stage. This system had the potential for inconsistent outcomes and varying response times. The formal stage of the new procedure is handled by a student case management team, which is separate to all faculties and should improve consistency. In addition, a record will be kept

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/student-voice.php>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/monitoring-improvement.php>

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/govandsec/committee\\_handbook.php](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/govandsec/committee_handbook.php)

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/assessment/docs/complaints.pdf> and <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/assessment/docs/academic-appeals.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/students/assessments/>

of all formal complaints to identify trends and the capacity to deal with group complaints.

The newly introduced form is useful, as it explains the amount of detail that is needed and requests that the complainant clarify their desired outcome.

The Academic Appeal process has introduced 'results surgeries' which focus on early resolution. This is extremely beneficial to students during a stressful time. The Case Management Team manage appeals, which will ensure consistency for all students. The need for students to explain why they were unable to submit exceptional factors at the time of assessment has also been removed.

#### 4.11. How is employability embedded in the curriculum for students?

Employability outcomes are part of curriculum framework and embedded in every course. The University has invested heavily in employability and continues to do so, recognising there is still a considerable improvement required. The University has recently reorganised the department, providing an employability directorate, and The Union are looking forward to working more with this newly established division.

Following the Employability Review undertaken in autumn 2013, Manchester Met created the Employability, Employment and Enterprise (E3) Strategy. The Union was involved in its creation and supports efforts to focus on student employment success. Compared to the sector average Manchester Met have been weak in this area (indicated in league table and key information set information) and the NSS question "As a result of my course my career prospects have improved", although improving, has been a low scoring area by comparison to the sector average.

The E3 Strategy focusses on increasing opportunities for students to gain accredited work experience through placement and internships and personal development plans supported by personal tutors and professional services. The embedding of the strategy focusses on building employability into the curriculum across the board with programmes who have been underachieving in terms of employability receiving targeted support to rectify underlying issues in the curriculum, teaching and personal tutoring.

DELHE scores are a key performance indicator, and the aim for the employment element of the strategy is to ensure that Manchester Met improve the

percentage of graduates in a positive destination of employment or further study.

The Union welcome the institution's focus on employability and embedding this in the curriculum to ensure students are prepared for work post-graduation. We introduced a category for Outstanding Teaching for Employability to the Teaching Awards in order to recognise the importance of this aspect of teaching to students. Below are some of the comments taken from the nominations in this category which highlight why students feel this is an important aspect of their education:

*"I chose this course because of a career change, and this was the only university that integrated the industrial placement into the course syllabus. I never expected to get a work-placement tester in the first year, and it seems second year as well, this has come as a healthy surprise. We learned about welfare reform for example in class late last year. And in my present first year work-placement in a social housing trust, I am discussing welfare reform with heads of department and seeing how staff members are using the knowledge of welfare reform in their role."* Public Services student

*"\*\*\* is extremely dedicated to helping students become the best that they can be in order to secure employment at the end of the MSc Computing by equipping them with the knowledge needed and setting expectations of industry due to extensive industrial experience and links with the University."* Computing student

#### Next Steps:

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met continues to focus on improving links with industry professionals, opportunities for work placements to gain industry experience and continue to embed employability into course units rather than creating standalone units. It is also recommended that Manchester Met continue to adapt modes of assessment to ensure they are creative and innovative in their approach to ensure students are being assessed on skills needed for future employment.**

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**4.12. How satisfied are students with careers and other services provided?**

In the 2009 Review, The Union stated that “MMU should be critically reflective of the purpose, need and value of support services, particularly the Careers Service, to support students in difficult economic times.”

Manchester Met’s Careers and Employability Service provides information, advice and guidance to students, graduates, university staff and employers. Support is available for students throughout their studies, and for up to three years following graduation. The Graduate School provides dedicated support for PGR students and the Graduate Extension Scheme provides post-doctoral opportunities for all international PGR students. The Union commends the University’s work in building the support services available to students on campus and would suggest that more course specific knowledge should be covered through a robust personal tutoring system.

Manchester Met demonstrate their commitment to supporting students in difficult economic times through both the Access to Learning Fund and the Emergency Hardship Loan. The Union’s Advice Centre promotes both schemes. In the academic year 2012/13 the institution awarded a total of £532,145 to students through the Access to Learning Fund and £59,700 through the Emergency Hardship Loan.

The Union also recommended “MMU should reflect on how to define and communicate the purpose of different services for students to avoid confusion and develop and continue the excellent provision.” Since the last review, Manchester Met have made huge positive changes to services provided to support students through their learning and throughout their student experience.

Central services and departments are a priority for the institution and students receive information pre-registration about the University’s learning support services as well as upon arrival. Central services are represented on faculty-level meetings and are reviewed every year as part of Manchester Met’s annual strategy planning and review. The University’s Student Support Services are provided at institutional, faculty and programme level and information about services is provided through the Induction Home Page, Policies, Regulations and Procedures Handbook, programme handbooks and the online Student Hub. Student hubs provide a central physical location within faculties for students to receive information on accommodation, finances and employability services. Manchester Met received the Government standard

Customer Service Excellence Award in September 2015. As part of the award scheme the University created a dedicated webpage with resources for staff including demographic information about each faculty. The Union believe this information should be updated annually and used more widely by faculty staff and academics.<sup>43</sup>

**4.13. How satisfied are international students? What welcome do they get from the University?**

Manchester Met has relatively low numbers of international students for an institution of its size. International students are supported by the international office, which provides many parallel services for these students. If the number of international students increases this could have implications on resource requirements and may become disproportionate. The Union would like to see international student provision more integrated with UK domicile support. International students have an individual page on the Student Hub, which includes extensive information on support with finances, banking, doctors and welfare in the Manchester area. The University arranges an airport pickup for international students upon their arrival in the UK, pay for membership to the International Society in Manchester, and run a co-ordinated week of events and induction talks ahead of home students’ Welcome Week. Manchester Met also provides pre-registration English language courses where necessary alongside writing and numeracy sessions available to all students throughout the academic year.

In the 2009 Institutional Audit, The Union recommended that “MMU should implement and review the Student Induction and Transition Framework, working with The Union to test the effectiveness of the system from a student perspective.” The review looked at the entire student induction process and resulted in significant changes to the delivery of Welcome events. This included the addition of a bespoke set of events for international students in the week preceding Welcome Week.

The main mechanism used by the institution to gauge international student satisfaction is the International Student Barometer (ISB). At the time of compiling this document the 2015 results had not been released therefore we refer to data from the

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/sas/studentservices/customerserviceexcellence.php>



2013 survey when Manchester Met last took part. In autumn 2013 Manchester Met saw a record number of international and EU students take part in the survey with a participation rate of 36% which is in excess of the national average of 28% participation. The institution received positive improvements on aspects of welcomes and arrival as well as the 'learning' bank of questions with international students reporting positively on the institution preparing them for a job and the teaching quality of their classes. Decreases were seen in areas such as internet access at accommodation sites and understanding how the course would work in advance. In terms of student support International/EU students participating in the survey in 2013 rated Manchester Met as excellent with individual support areas scoring between 89-98%. Although some of the topics surveyed in the ISB have similarity to the NSS it is not possible to do meaningful direct comparison due to the contrast in the student populations and response rates.<sup>44</sup>

The Union will seek to ensure that plans to increase the number of international students at Manchester Met are supported by aspirations to maintain and improve levels of international support and satisfaction.

#### 4.14. How useful is the University online provision?

The introduction and subsequent annual improvement of Moodle has taken place since the last audit. The institution use the student portal to deliver the personalised Internal Student Survey (ISS), which includes free text responses for students to comment on the best things and things they would like to see improved about their course and units.

Response rates to the survey have been between 30-35% across each term since the survey began in 2011 and all ISS data (over 750,000 ratings and over 300,000 comments) have been loaded into the new CMI dashboard where they are available to programme and unit leaders to help target and inform enhancement plans. Manchester Met's learning innovation team undertook a detailed thematic analysis of over 2,000 comments about Moodle in the last December survey and developed bespoke faculty staff development programmes in response, plus

follow-up work with academic staff in relation to their understanding of the issues students were raising.

In the December 2014 Internal Student Survey (ISS) Thematic Analysis<sup>45</sup> the highest scoring themes for what is best about Moodle and what could be improved are:

Highest scoring best themes relating to Moodle:

Theme	Result
Organisation and quality of resources in Moodle	187
Communication (clearer information and faster responses)	155
Updated teaching materials to Moodle	138
Advance availability of teaching materials via Moodle	105

Highest scoring improvement themes relating to Moodle:

Theme	Result
Content well organised/high quality	183
Provision/use of audio/video materials	166
Effective Communication	127
Moodle update/advanced material	122

As evidenced above students appreciate well-organised Moodle units with high quality resources and criticise poorly organised Moodle units as this creates an inconsistent experience. This could be due to different teaching styles or levels of engagement with Moodle across academic staff at Manchester Met.

In addition to Moodle, and its companion app, the University has made good progress in other online resources. Online enrolment, coursework submission and the central information hub on the main website are all good examples of how Manchester Met is invested in providing good online resources.

#### Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met continue the good work being developed on bespoke faculty staff development programmes to ensure a level of consistency in the use of Moodle across programmes, staff are aware of issues being raised by**

<sup>44</sup> [http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/ISB\\_2013.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/voice/docs/ISB_2013.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> <https://onedrive.live.com/redir?resid=50CF6D86FB946684!120&authkey=!ANQwYM3O2vQMxe0&ithint=file%2cpdf>

students regarding online provision and are equipped to develop these areas appropriately.

for future placement development and enhancement activities.

#### 4.15. How satisfied are students who undertake work placements?

The NSS asks NHS-funded students about their experience of work placements but does not cover students in any other course/programme who undertake an industrial work placement throughout their studies. None of the central surveys that students take part in ask about placements directly however faculties do their own evaluations with students regarding their time in industry. It is difficult for The Union to make a fair comment on this as we tend to only see students through the Advice Centre when they are having a negative experience with their placement. The main issues raised by students through the Education and HPSC Shout Outs in relation to placements were around delays to placement allocation and worries of the impact this could have on their assessment deadlines. Again, this is anecdotal evidence that cannot provide a fair overview of the experience of students on placements as a whole. Individual programmes that offer placements collate information about the student experience, however this information is not centralised so we cannot cross-compare to provide balanced comment.

Alongside the institution's commitment to increasing student employability a large number of programmes offer periods of placement or work-based learning where appropriate. Manchester Met provides 200 fee waivers (up to the full value of £680) for sandwich year students with a household income of less than £25,000. Clear and consistent structures are in place through faculty SAS to deliver administrative support for placements; however, it may be useful to build into the experiences of students on placements into the CMI database. Although there is no central information on student satisfaction with industrial placements Manchester Met's commitment to quality assurance is evident through both internal and external consultation during programme design and development. The approval of placement activity is co-ordinated by faculty-level placement support officers and a tripartite agreement forms an integral part of the placement approval process.

#### Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met collate central information about the student experience and satisfaction with both industrial and mandatory work placements at both a faculty and university-wide level**

#### 4.16. Does your University have a document (student charter) that sets out mutual expectations? Are students aware of this?

In the previous QAA audit The Union recommended that the institution ensure that the student agreement was a relevant document and appropriate measurement and management systems were out in place to ensure that the commitment could be met. Manchester Met and The Union jointly developed the Student Commitment,<sup>46</sup> which outlines commitments from the University, The Union and from students. In May 2015, Manchester Met began its third review of the document, working with The Union to evaluate relevance to students and whether the University and The Union have maintained their commitments.

The University and The Union took a unique approach to the review, organising an audit of adherence to the commitment. Colleagues from across the University were asked to provide evidence of adherence to the commitment, and then stakeholders including academic colleagues and student representatives were invited to workshops to scrutinise evidence of the commitment in action. Findings from the various workshops and communications with staff formed the Student Commitment Review report, which was approved at the Student Experience Committee on 27 May 2015 and referred to Academic Board for action. The Committee have proposed that Manchester Met now work with The Union to raise awareness of the Student Commitment amongst the student body and to ensure that the document is more prominent on the 'New to MMU' webpage. Course Representative Support Staff plan to speak to students every two weeks on a different commitment from the University to inform the second term Student Voice Report.

The University Commitment is now a fixed agenda item in the spring term Programme Committees across the institution ensuring feedback from students is documented. The Union are currently undergoing an external audit of its commitments to ensure it is meeting the expectations contained in the document.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/commitment/>



## Next Steps

**The Union recommends that Manchester Met continue to work closely with The Union in raising awareness of the Student Commitment amongst students and making it a live document. We also recommend that the commitment continues as a fixed agenda item at Programme Committees in the spring term and that feedback is documented and used to inform future progress and enhancement activities.**

## 5. Enhancement

### 5.1. How does the University listen to the student voice when considering enhancement?

Sabbatical officers represent students as members of the majority of senior decision-making committees, including the University's Board of Governors, Academic Board, Student Experience Committee and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. In addition to formal committees, the University has developed a strong culture of engagement with The Union on enhancement projects and initiatives. There has been a steady increase in requests for students' union involvement in enhancement projects since the last review, as evidenced by increased demands on sabbatical officer and staff diaries.

Termly Student Voice Reports produced by The Union are used as a mechanism to communicate student opinion to the University. They are considered at the Student Experience Committee and often result in a response and action from the institution.

The Continuous Monitoring and Improvement process evidences that student feedback is an essential part of the evidence base. The ISS and NSS feedback informs the writing and development of Continuous Improvement Plans. The plan is approved, discussed and developed during programme committee meetings, and the process requires that the programme leader keeps all stakeholders, including students, regularly informed of progress on actions within the Continuous Improvement Plan.<sup>47</sup> As noted above there are targeted NSS action plans within faculties and departments as well as the Continuous

Improvement Plans created through feedback from the Internal Student Survey (ISS).

The introduction of students as full panel members on PARM and the positive use of the course rep system through the committee structure shows a willingness from the institution to seek student feedback in order to improve and enhance their offering. The elected Sabbatical Officers alongside staff from The Union being included on committees and working groups adds to the evidence that Manchester Met are committed to listening to the student voice when considering enhancement.

### 5.2. How are students made aware of any changes or improvements to their educational experience and are they aware of an ethos of continual improvement in the University?

There is information which supports there being an ethos of continual improvement in the University based on the recent centralisation of Manchester campuses,<sup>48</sup> the introduction of the Student Commitment,<sup>49</sup> improvements to the academic and complaints procedures, investment in employability, the introduction of faculty student support officers and student experience tutors, continuous monitoring and improvement process.<sup>50</sup>

Communications about changes to the estate have been strong, whereas the University has been less strong on communicating changes to regulation and curriculum. This is only an issue where a change directly affects a course or program that is underway.

Student shout outs, now replaced by SSLC, are an opportunity for students to raise issues. The feedback loop has not always been consistent across faculties. We are working with institution and deans to ensure more direct feedback.

Sabbatical officers sit on various project boards, committees and working groups across the institution and are involved in many of the decisions and discussions around the continual improvement of the campus. It appears that information about major changes and improvements is mainly communicated through the website and Moodle because students are expected to access these sources on a regular basis.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/monitoring-improvement.php>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/about/investment>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www2.mmu.ac.uk/commitment/>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/experience/cmi.php>

This could be an area for development, for example the proposed move towards a central system for student communications.

## 6. Public information

### 6.1. How user-friendly and up to date is the website/information provided to students? Is it accurate?

The Union made a recommendation in the 2009 audit that “MMU should develop ‘browseable’ programme information online that is written in understandable English, as standard across the University.” There have been advancements in the development of the online Student Hub and specific programme pages as well as an easily browseable and well maintained online prospectus.

The Union also recommended that “MMU should consider the Prospectus a source of reference for students; expectations to usual programme information should be made clear and programmes should ask students throughout their enrolment to assess how they meet advertised promises.” The introduction of the CMA guidance and legislation means that this is likely to become increasingly the case as universities will feel increasing pressure to ensure the course content and structure is as close as possible to what is advertised. Our indications are that the University are proactively embracing the introduction of the CMA and involving The Union in working groups across the institution in preparation for student contracts and the opportunity to use key information sets as promotional material through their paper and online content.

The Union suggests that this may be supported through an alternative prospectus-style piece of work giving students information about what to expect in terms of additional costs and student life at Manchester Met, based on case studies from current students. Manchester Met have stated in their Self Evaluation Document that where a programme is subject to significant change or discontinuation during the application cycle, they will inform prospective students at the earliest practical opportunity and provide support for applicants to either identify an alternative programme at the University or similar provision at another institution.

stress caused by assessment bunching as much as reasonably possible.

There should be consistency in the communication and online availability of external examiner reports, with academic staff actively explaining the process of external examining to students and sign-posting them to the reports. This availability should be monitored by faculties and presented at the appropriate committee. The Union also suggests that Manchester Met should consider the opportunity for students and external examiners to meet and there should be parity on the process across all faculties.

The Union believes there should be more frequent forms of formative assessment that also provide real world experience, in order to reduce reliance on major pieces of group course work whilst maintaining a strong link to employability. This could include shorter placement opportunities, the creation of individual blogs, guest lectures and access to industry professionals throughout students’ time of study.

The Union would like to see more creative use of assessment formats and feedback across the institution.

Manchester Met should continue its commitment to assessment and feedback on in-unit assessments within four weeks, putting measures in place to ensure this happens. Further work should take place to manage student expectation about feedback types, amount, delivery and advice on how to use this feedback to improve academically at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There should also be a tracker in place that is presented termly to the appropriate University committee to ensure that all students receive their feedback within the guaranteed four-week period.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met continue the good work that has gone into ensuring that students are aware of grading criteria, and make the use of templates clearly stating grading criteria compulsory for each piece of assessed work across the institution.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met revise the central student communications plan for changes to academic regulations. This should include various forms of communication and rely less on academic staff and The Union to filter the message to individual cohorts.

Manchester Met and The Union should continue to work in partnership recruiting and training student members of PARM panels. The introduction of

## NEXT STEPS SUMMARY

The Union would like to see other faculties follow the lead of HLSS in ensuring they relieve the

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students as full members on the panels is a positive move, however more work needs to be done to ensure that there is genuine student involvement in curriculum design leading to the review panel rather than just at the panel itself. This would further recognise students as experts in HE by experience.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met continues to demonstrate its commitment to professional development for all staff who teach at both the University and collaborative partners. It is also recommended that robust data be collected and maintained in terms of teaching staff who hold a qualification, or who are working towards one, to be included in promotional literature such as website content, online prospectus materials and Key Information Sets moving forward.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met continues to focus on improving links with industry professionals, opportunities for work placements to gain industry experience and continue to embed employability into course units rather than creating standalone units. It is also recommended that Manchester Met continue to adapt modes of assessment to ensure they are creative and innovative in their approach to ensure students are being assessed on skills needed for future employment.

The Union recommend that Manchester Met continue the good work being developed on bespoke faculty staff development programmes to ensure a level of consistency in the use of Moodle across programmes, staff are aware of issues being raised by students regarding online provision and are equipped to develop these areas appropriately.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met collate central information about the student experience and satisfaction with both industrial and mandatory work placements at both a faculty and university-wide level for future placement development and enhancement activities.

The Union recommends that Manchester Met continue to work closely with The Union in raising awareness of the Student Commitment amongst students and making it a live document. We also recommend that the commitment continues as a fixed agenda item at Programme Committees in the spring term and that feedback is documented and used to inform future progress and enhancement activities.

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