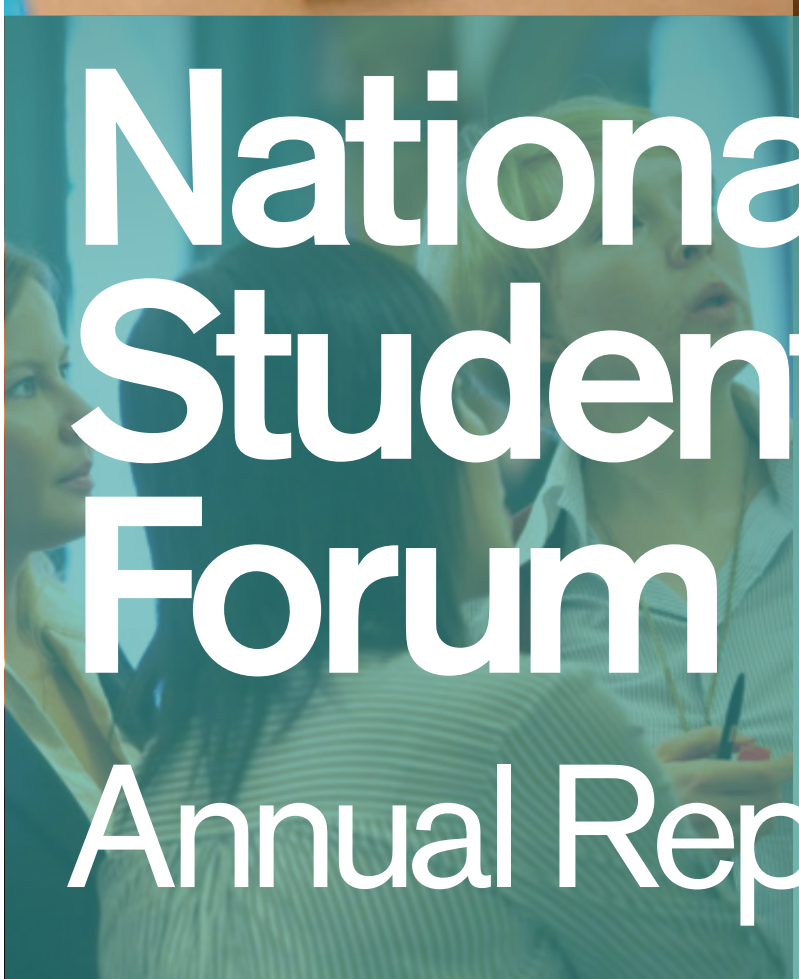
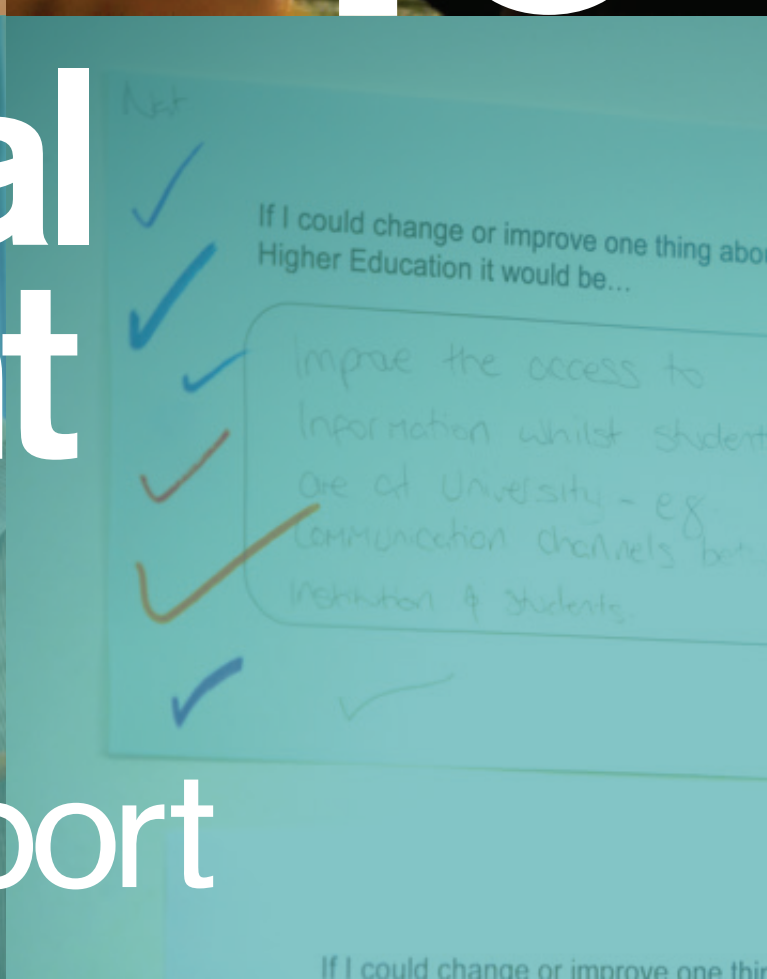
National Student Forum

10

National Student Forum

Annual Report





Foreword 03

Executive Summary 05

Introduction 10

Chapter 1: Policy perspectives and priorities 12

Chapter 2: Sustainability 16

Chapter 3: Developing a student-centred university 28

Chapter 4: Next steps: leveraging the Forum's legacy 42

Appendix A: NSF: remit, membership and ways of working 46

Appendix B: Members of the National Student Forum 48

Acknowledgements 54

Foreword

Welcome to the third, and final, report of the National Student Forum.

I have been Chair of the NSF since its inception in 2008, and am proud of our achievements during our three years of operation: we have influenced policy direction, encouraged good practice across the sector and provided evidence to improve the student experience.

Since 2008, I have been delighted to see our work echoed by a significant shift in the way so many organisations – from government to sector organisations, from representative organisations to individual universities – are listening to the student voice; or, perhaps more accurately, the diverse voices of students. Indeed, I hope that the NSF has played its part in inspiring and embedding this.

During this period, we have developed many recommendations for government and national sector organisations. However, what has been particularly striking to me, and pertinent to the Forum's ways of working, is the degree to which improvements to so many aspects of the student experience are in the hands of individual institutions. It is this that led to our increased focus on the approaches we would like to see individual institutions employ, supported by case studies to inspire and facilitate peer improvement. In such a highly autonomous system, it is improvement at this level that will make the critical difference to most students. That means, however, that the Forum's potential impact and legacy is dependent upon the extent to which individual institutions choose to respond to our suggestions.

I have always believed that the NSF's strength has been its ability to acknowledge, explore and articulate the perspectives of the student body in all its diversity. Therefore, as our work draws to a close, I urge government and sector organisations to ensure that they are listening to and involving a diverse range of students in the development and review of policy and practice. In addition, I encourage universities to pick up the NSF baton and work with their student representatives to identify effective ways to involve the widest range of students possible, to better understand how they can improve the student experience at that particular institution.

I would like to acknowledge the helpful contributions from Ministers and sector experts who met with us over the course of the year and provided invaluable information about what is already happening in the higher education landscape. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank all the members who have dedicated so much time and energy to the Forum's work and with whom it has been a privilege to work.

Maeve Sherlock,
Chair, National Student Forum

If I could change or improve one thing about Higher Education it would be...
Improved Feedback
If I could change or improve one thing about Higher Education it would be...

Report approach and outcomes

During our three years as a Forum, we have successfully engaged with stakeholders and policymakers, making a range of recommendations for implementation at a national level. However, with listening to the student voice now more strongly embedded in sector ways of working at a national level, and with a clear sense that much of the improvement for the student experience needs to take place at the local level, it is a fitting time to bring the work of the Forum to a close.

In acknowledgement that the sector needed time to absorb the recommendations we have produced to date, we restricted our new work this year to exploring sustainability at the institutional level. We recognise that higher education is delivered in many different contexts, but use the term 'university' as a shorthand throughout this report to refer to the whole range of higher education institutions.

We focused our energies on developing an overall picture of a student-centred university and feeding into national policy discussions. To an even greater extent than last year, the audience for this report is individual universities and colleges. We therefore encourage universities to listen, reflect and consider any action that it might be appropriate to take at an institutional level to improve the student experience in the featured areas.

With the Forum's work coming to an end, we are keen that Government, sector organisations and universities themselves pick up the baton and continue to devise appropriate, effective and inclusive ways to hear from and involve the student body in all its diversity.

1. Policy perspectives and priorities

Widening participation, increasing flexibility and innovation, and promoting excellent teaching are amongst the most important aspects of higher education to us as students – and to the student juries that informed much of our agenda setting process as a Forum. We hope to see these priorities reflected in the policies of the new Government.

Widening participation
To widen participation, we would like to see an increased focus on:

- aspiration and orientation programmes
- developing and promoting inclusive university-wide cultures
- the use of contextual data in admissions
- improved information, advice and guidance[1]

[1]Improved IAG

- a more structured and stringent quality assurance monitoring programme for IAG in schools
- a requirement for all schools and colleges to have access to a dedicated HE advisor
- further use of alumni as ambassadors and as mentors
- increased promotion of the full range of progression routes, either into higher education or further education as appropriate e.g. via apprenticeships, Open University or part-time routes

Executive Summary

1. Policy perspectives and priorities (Cont…)

Increasing flexibility and innovation
We see increased flexibility of provision as a priority for the sector as a whole. We do not necessarily believe that all universities need to offer all forms of provision immediately, however, we do urge all universities to commit to a systematic review of provision to identify which courses could appropriately and effectively be adapted for other modes of learning (e.g. for distance learning and part-time learning), thus demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning.

Improving pre-entry information
In our 2008 report, we suggested that universities should publish a standard set of information setting out what students can expect from their academic programme – we are pleased to see that the coalition government will be taking this forward.*

However, we would also like to see:

- An approach to providing pre-information to applicants that is broadly standardised, but which nevertheless recognises the different strengths and approaches of different types of universities
- Additional or differentiated information for disabled, postgraduate and part-time students, where appropriate
- Increased visibility of the information on UCAS and Unistats, and improved advice about how to interpret the information on UCAS and Unistats e.g. better links from UCAS to the Unistats website to raise the latter's profile and advice about which site provides what information
- Improved functionality and content on the UCAS website e.g. the ability to search for a wide range of higher education courses, such as part-time or distance courses

2. Sustainability

We are delighted that HEFCE (in partnership with UUK and GuildHE) has recently launched a carbon reduction target and strategy for higher education.† However, we are keen that improvements and efforts constitute a genuine, sector-wide commitment to achieving sustainability in all its senses – environmental, financial and social – rather than purely a response to funding incentives and legal requirements to reduce carbon emissions.

We invite universities to benchmark their current provision against our suggestions for how to increase the focus on sustainability within individual institutions. We urge universities to consider these in conjunction with the case studies that provide examples of where such activity is already being implemented. We also make one recommendation for government and sector organisations.

*For detail of the coalition agreement on HE, see http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf

†Carbon reduction target and strategy for higher education in England, January 2010/01, produced by HEFCE, UUK, GuildHE, http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_01/

How can student representatives and students' unions further support the sustainability agenda?

- **Implement fun, student-led education programmes for fellow students**
- **Promote a positive image of sustainable living through, for example, the use of role models, positioning it as both aspirational and simple to achieve**
- **Purchase union products and services from companies that adhere to tight environmental standards, where possible**
- **Lead student campaigns to raise awareness and put pressure on universities to create and adhere to sustainability strategies**
- **Maximise close working relationships with the local council and government**
- **Promote sustainability amongst union staff and officers, including offering informal or formal learning opportunities**
- **Push sustainability up the student agenda by encouraging debate on sustainability-associated topics**

How can universities further support the sustainability agenda?
We believe there are three broad categories of action that can be taken by universities:

- Implement programmes designed to reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption e.g.
  - Incentivise individual departments/buildings to reduce consumption
  - Implement 'power down' programmes to ensure buildings do not draw unnecessary power when not in use
  - Permit submission of papers on double-sided paper or, better still, in electronic format only
- Promote behaviour change amongst students and staff e.g.
  - Encourage each department to nominate a sustainability ambassador
  - Hold sustainability awareness weeks
  - Introduce formal and informal learning opportunities around green issues
- Develop and promote more courses on 'green technologies,' 'green sciences' and 'green entrepreneurialism', as major subjects, or optional modules

We recommend that government and sector bodies incentivise universities to meet strict environmental and sustainability criteria e.g. by expanding the current scope of QAA audits

3. A student-centred university

Much of our attention as a Forum has been focused on the ways in which various aspects of higher education – whether Teaching and Learning, Student Finance or Information, Advice and Guidance – can become more student-focused. As a culmination of our work over the past three years, we felt it would be useful to build a picture of what a genuinely student-centred university looks like.

1. What we expect from Student Services:

- inclusive and accessible
- highly pro-active in promoting its services
- places strong emphasis on staff being good listeners
- ensures staff are available to students in a variety of ways, including web chats
- protects students' data and ensures anonymity where appropriate
- co-designs its services with students
- 'joins up the dots'

2. Principles and priorities of a Finance Office:

- fair
- flexible about when and how to pay tuition fees
- transparent
- promotes social equality
- demonstrates an active commitment to securing the best outcomes for students

3. A student-centred Administrative System should be:

- accessible to all students
- responsive
- pro-active in providing students with all the information they need
- open to suggestions about new ways of working
- committed to keeping bureaucracy to a minimum

4. A customer-focused Accommodation Service is:

- impartial
- inclusive, accessible to, and respectful of, all students
- honest
- pro-active in seeking feedback from students
- knowledgeable and well-informed
- pro-active in promoting a positive image of students to local communities to support better social cohesion

5. A positive teaching and learning experience

If a university is getting this right, a student should be able to say:

- Before I arrived, I knew broadly what to expect
- I feel supported in my learning
- My lecturers are trained, supported and incentivised to teach me well
- I am inspired and challenged
- Assessment and feedback are used to improve my achievement in future, not just judge my performance to date

4. Leveraging the Forum's legacy

The potential for a real and lasting legacy for our work will be as a result of our focus on the improvement measures that can be taken *locally* and at an institutional level. We therefore urge individual institutions to:

- 'benchmark' their provision against our visions and suggested practice for universities, across the wide range of topics we have covered during the last three years
- consider how similar student listening initiatives might be implemented to improve provision at a local level (in addition to existing student representative structures)

The National Student Forum was originally set up by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS, now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, BIS) in early 2008. The forum was created to give a greater voice to students on higher education courses across England and to ensure that policies were the better for being informed by the student voice. It comprises an independent Chair, Maeve Sherlock, appointed by BIS, two Vice-Chairs (elected by members), and 17 other volunteer members who reflect the diversity of the undergraduate and postgraduate population.†*

Since our inception as a Forum in 2008, we have been delighted to see ever increasing recognition for the role of the student voice as an effective improvement mechanism; at the level of national policymaking, amongst sector bodies and at the level of individual institutions. An increasing number of sector and representative organisations now work with students as collaborators and reviewers, and we welcome the systematic and productive engagement which is beginning to take place. Indeed, we hope that the NSF itself has helped to inspire, encourage and embed some of this activity.

During our three years as a Forum, we have successfully engaged with stakeholders and policymakers, making a range of recommendations for implementation at a national level. However, in order to improve the student experience for as wide a range of students as possible, we increasingly realised the importance of focusing our attention on improving provision at the local level.

Therefore, over the last two years in particular, we began to focus on articulating a series of visions and pictures of suggested practice for many aspects of higher education, designed for use by individual universities as benchmarks against which to measure their current provision. This report continues to embody this approach.

With the student voice now more strongly embedded in sector ways of working at a national level, and with a clear sense that, in such an autonomous sector, much of the improvement for the student experience needs to take place at the local level, it is a fitting time to bring the work of the Forum to a close. However, as our 'Next Steps' chapter makes clear, we are keen that both sector organisations and universities themselves pick up the baton and continue to devise appropriate, effective and inclusive ways to hear from the student body in all its diversity.

Report purpose, approach and audience for recommendations

When developing the agenda for our third year of operation, and with a general election in the offing, we chose to keep our recommendations at a national level to a minimum; pausing to provide the opportunity for appropriate reflection and to enable the sector to absorb our recommendations from the previous two years.

Our report this year is, therefore, not only briefer than has previously been the case, but once again has a strong emphasis on improvement at a local level. We looked at the ways in which universities could better support the sustainability agenda and, by way of reflection on the main focus of our work to date, began to pull together an overall picture of what we believe a student-centred university should look like.

Whilst some of this report aims to inform the thinking of the new Government as it develops its higher education policy, the majority is aimed at supporting and encouraging universities and colleges to undertake continuous improvement. We recognise that higher education takes place in many different contexts, but for the purposes of this report, we use the term 'university' as a shorthand to refer to the whole range of higher education institutions.

---

*For details of NSF remit and ways of working, see Appendix A

†For details of NSF members 2010, see Appendix B

Introduction

Report purpose, approach and audience for recommendations (Cont…)

The report sets out:

- 'ideal visions' of how things should be if everything is working well
- suggestions as to how universities and colleges can support students in each area – with illustrative examples of where this is already happening
- recommendations for new policy or increased focus, for further consideration by Government and/or sector organisations as appropriate

Report outcomes

To an even greater extent than last year, the audience for this report is individual universities and colleges. We therefore encourage universities to listen, reflect and consider any action that it might be appropriate to take at an institutional level to improve the student experience in the featured areas.

We also hope that the final 'Next Steps' chapter in this report will inspire universities and colleges to implement similar student listening programmes (in addition to the student representative structures already in place) to improve the student experience for all students within their respective institutions.

01

Policy perspectives and priorities

Part of the NSF's core remit is to give a greater voice to students during the development of higher education policy, providing a student perspective on emerging policy areas and helping to evaluate the impact of existing policies on students in different circumstances.

With the new Government now in office, and the Forum's work drawing to a close, we are keen to take this final opportunity to share our views on some of the aspects of higher education policy that are most important to us as students, and which were identified as priorities by the student jury process that informed both our initial and on going thinking:* **widening participation; increasing flexibility and innovation; improving pre-entry information.** We would like to thank the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Strategy Unit, and the HE Academy for their invaluable contributions to our discussions in these areas.

Although initiated in response to *Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy*†, we urge the new Government to consider the implications of these perspectives for future policy direction and welcome its commitment to keeping the student experience high on the policy agenda.

1. Widening participation

Aspiration and orientation programmes

We would like to see a system that creates equal opportunities for people, based on ability and potential, rather than background. We note and strongly support the work of Aimhigher and very many universities in promoting higher education to students from poorer backgrounds and/or those for whom higher education might be outside their immediate social experience. To this end, we would like to see ever increasing partnerships between schools and universities to run 'aspiration and orientation' programmes to prepare under-privileged students from an early age.** However, we feel that raising awareness of higher education amongst such students is only half the battle.

An inclusive culture

Obviously, many such students will require practical support in the form of structured financial assistance packages. In addition, if such students are both to apply to university and flourish for the duration of their studies, universities will also need to be able to offer genuine and concrete assurances that the university *culture* welcomes and supports students from all backgrounds. If universities are serious about widening participation, they need to consider *every* aspect of the student experience (from pre-entry, induction or matriculation processes to shopping and catering outlets) and whether there are any implications for making it more inclusive for its applicants from less traditional backgrounds.

Use of contextual data in admissions

In addition, when considering making an offer, we believe it is critical that universities consider 'the bigger picture' and use a range of contextual data in their admission procedures. This will ensure that they are making an offer based on an individual's potential to achieve – rather than simply their achievement to date. For example, some students may have been educationally disadvantaged and/or had reduced access to extra-curricular activity; for others, disabilities, impairments or health issues may have impacted upon grades to date. Universities might consider the wider use of interviews, or placing particular emphasis on personal statements when dealing with applications from less traditional students.

Improved information, advice and guidance

Much of our work as a Forum has focused on Information, Advice and Guidance,†† and clearly this plays a critical role in encouraging applications from as wide a range of students as possible. In addition to our previous recommendations, we would like to see the following in place:

- **A more structured and stringent quality assurance monitoring programme for IAG** in schools. As highlighted in our 2008 report, the quality of IAG is still unacceptably patchy, with pockets of both excellence and poor provision

*The student juries formed part of the Labour government's student listening programme

†The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Higher Ambitions: the future of universities in a knowledge economy, November, 2009, http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/h/09-1447-higher-ambitions.pdf

**Case studies of partnerships between schools and universities can be found in Higher Education engagement with schools and colleges: Partnership Development , published by UUK for the NCEE and accessible at: http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/HEengagementWithSchools.aspx.

††For further detail, see NSF report 2008, Information, Advice and Guidance, www.bis.gov.uk/studentexperience

Think of an organisation
What do they do! / What can
retail => mission
welcoming
open-ended
customer is
follow up
Connect with
How does this make you feel as
- relaxed
- instills loyalty -
- 'unique' experience
=> satisfa
- trust

1. Widening participation (Cont…)

- **A requirement for all schools and colleges to have access to a dedicated HE advisor** – not simply a Connexions advisor who is frequently required to advise on a wider range of progression options and welfare issues
- **Further use of alumni as ambassadors and as mentors** over time, in all schools and colleges, in which students return to talk to and work with potential university applicants
- **Increased promotion of the full range of progression routes, either into higher education or further education as appropriate** e.g. via vocational routes such as apprenticeships that have UCAS points etc; via Open University (where there are no minimum qualification requirements); or via part-time routes

2. Increasing flexibility and innovation

We recognise the change in demand for higher education amongst mature and part-time students in particular, and both our previous reports articulated in detail the need to respond to this by increasing the flexibility of provision.* This remains a priority for us as a Forum.

We see this as a need for increased flexibility across the sector as a whole, rather than necessarily expecting *all* universities to immediately offer *all* kinds of provision. However, we do urge all universities to commit to a systematic review of provision to identify which courses could appropriately and effectively be adapted for other modes of learning (e.g. for distance learning and part-time learning).

3. Improving pre-entry information

In our 2008 report, we suggested that universities should publish a standard set of information setting out what students can expect from their academic programme – we are pleased to see that the coalition government will be taking this forward.†

However, we also suggested that pre-entry information should comprise not only academic programme information, but financial (including course costs such as books, field trips and equipment), pastoral and social information, as we feel that the standard set of information should take account of the broader student experience. We were delighted that our thinking in this area helped to inform recent research into *Understanding the information needs of public information about higher education*** commissioned by HEFCE.

We acknowledge that some of this information is now provided in the entry profile for courses and information about universities available on the UCAS website. However, there is still significant variation between institutions in the level of detail of information provided and the approach used. In addition, we once again draw attention to the differentiated pre-entry information we would like to see universities provide for disabled, postgraduate and mature and part-time students in particular, as highlighted in our 2009 report.††

We would like to see:

- An approach to providing pre-information to applicants that is broadly standardised, but which nevertheless recognises the different strengths and approaches of different types of universities
- Additional or differentiated information for disabled, postgraduate and part-time students, where appropriate
- Increased visibility of the information on institutional websites, UCAS and Unistats, and improved advice about how to interpret the information on UCAS and Unistats e.g. better links from UCAS to the Unistats website to raise the latter's profile and advice about which site provides what information
- Improved functionality and content on the UCAS website e.g. the ability to search for a wide range of higher education courses, such as part-time or distance courses

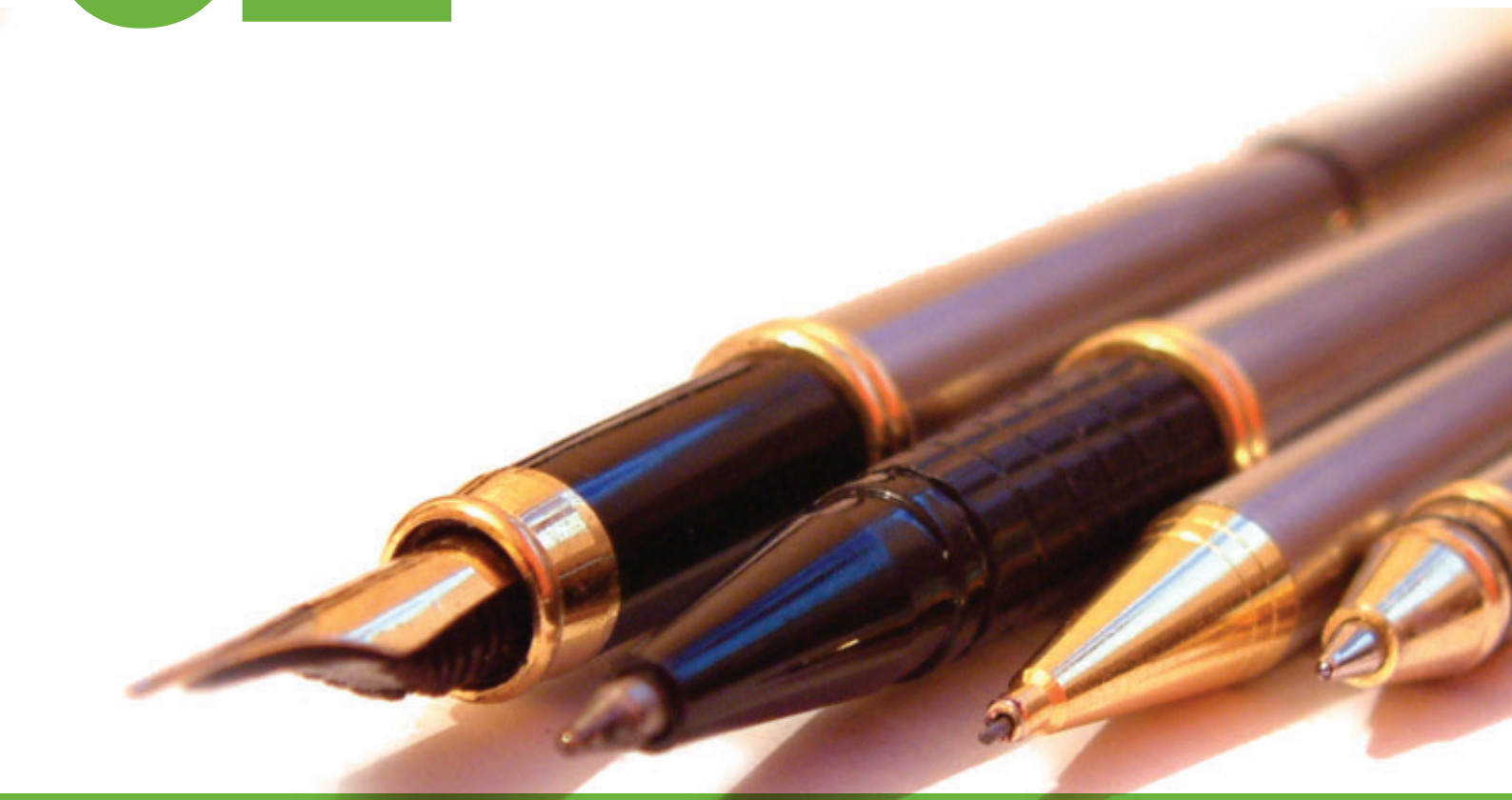
*For further detail, see NSF report 2009, Mature and Part-Time Students, www.bis.gov.uk/studentexperience

†For detail of the coalition agreement on HE, see http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf

**For detail, see http://www.HEFCE.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2010/rd12_10/

††Pages 49, 69 and 74 for postgraduate students, mature/part-time and disabled students respectively, 2009 National Student Forum Annual Report. See www.bis.gov.uk/studentexperience

02



Sustainability

What does sustainability mean to us?

'Sustainability' means different things to different people: environmental, social, political, economic and/or ethical. Whilst the word 'sustain' might suggest something that continues or remains the same, as forum members we associate it with progression.

Sustainability is a paradoxical term in some ways because it suggests something about keeping things as they are now. Rather, we need to move things forward in a different direction.
(NSF member)

Sustainability involves ensuring the next generation has the same opportunities as we have had. (NSF member)

Why focus on sustainability?

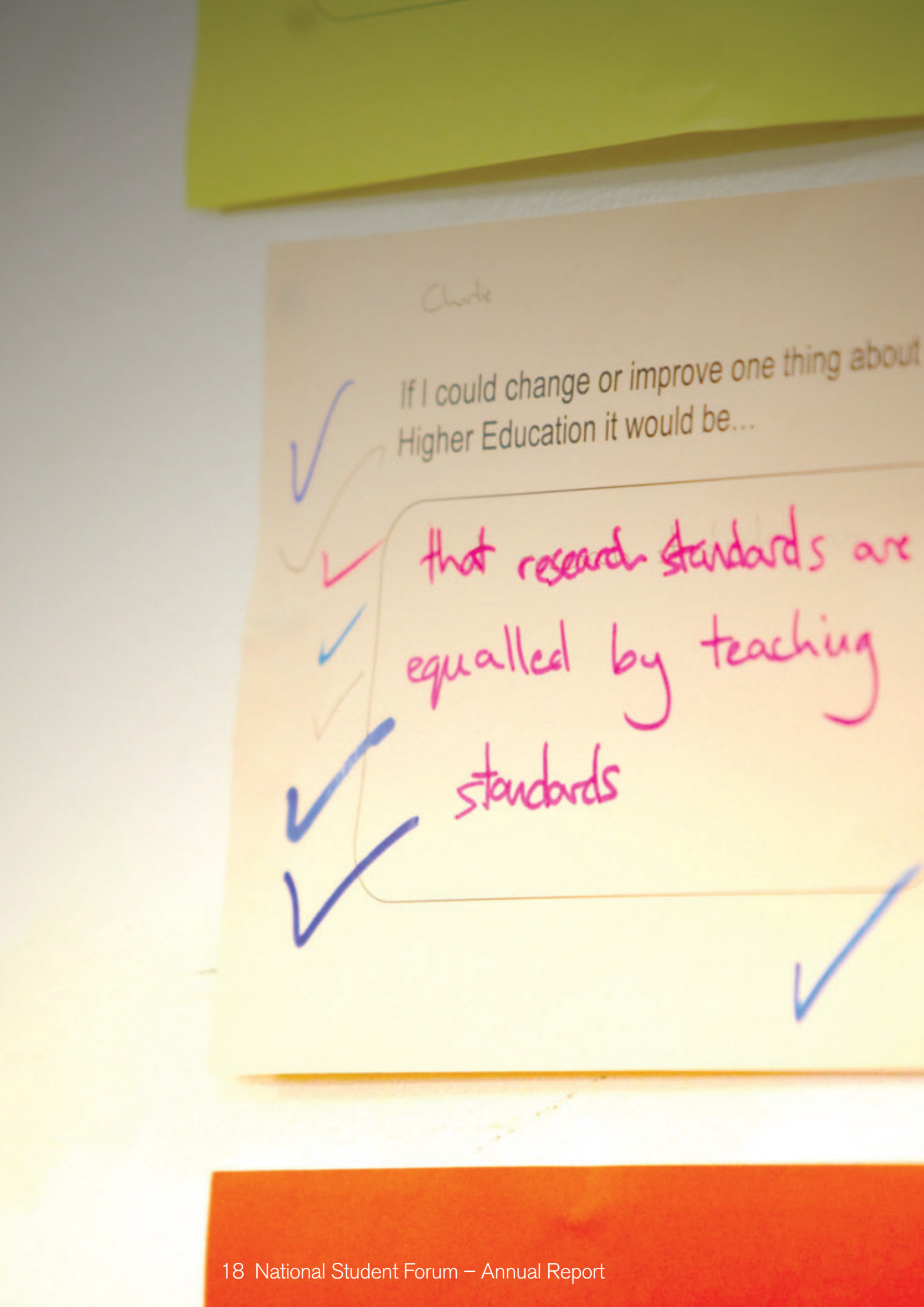
We chose to focus on this important area not only because many of us feel passionate about it in a personal capacity, but because we recognise the critical role that higher education plays in educating future decision-makers and developing technological innovations that can achieve a more sustainable way of living.

Issues highlighted by the Forum include: lack of control over thermostats in shared accommodation; library printers that do not allow for double-sided printing; submission criteria that prohibit the submission of work in electronic formats; heating and lighting in lecture and seminar rooms that are not in use. In isolation, these issues appear mundane and are hardly headline grabbing. However, if considered as the 'tip of the iceberg', they suggest situations in which day to day sustainability issues are not always as widely considered as they might be at every institution.

We can see that sustainability is a hot topic politically. Recent years have seen a raft of government initiatives and strategies to support specific aspects of sustainability, such as carbon emission reduction targets. In 2008, the Climate Change Act set out the world's first legally binding reduction targets for gas emissions. In 2008 and 2009, the former Labour Government's grant letters to HEFCE contained specific requirements to reflect this Act, pushing the need for universities to act sustainably, as individual organisations, higher up the agenda. We are therefore delighted that HEFCE (in partnership with UUK and GuildHE) has recently launched a carbon reduction target and strategy for higher education.*

However, we are keen that improvements and efforts constitute a genuine, sector-wide commitment to sustainability as a whole – rather than purely a response to funding incentives and legal requirements to reduce carbon emissions. We therefore also warmly welcome the approaches being undertaken both by individual institutions and via collaborative sector initiatives to drive, promote and embed sustainability within and across higher education. We have learned that these include:

*Carbon reduction target and strategy for higher education in England, January 2010/01, produced by HEFCE, UUK, GuildHE


If I could change or improve one thing about
Higher Education it would be...
that research standards are
equalled by teaching
standards

Why focus on sustainability? (Cont…)

The Green League Table

The Green League Table is published annually by People & Planet, a student network in Britain campaigning to end world poverty, defend human rights, and protect the environment. The Green League, which ranks the environmental performance of 133 UK universities, is published each year in the Times Higher. For more information see http://peopleandplanet.org/greenleague

Green Gown Awards

The Green Gown Awards, administered by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) and sponsored by the HE sector, is an annual, high profile awards scheme, recognising excellence in environmental achievements for universities in a variety of categories. For more information see http://www.eauc.org.uk/green_gown awards

SHED network

The Sustainability in Higher Education Developers (SHED) network is a collaboration between EAUC and the HE Academy's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) project. The purpose of the network is to share ideas, information and questions, and to allow those involved to develop collaborative work more easily. For more information see http://www.eauc.org.uk/under_the_same_roof_the_shed_sustainability_in_

Reassuringly, the consultation phase for the Carbon Reduction Strategy revealed a 70% level of support for the development of a higher education carbon reduction strategy.* We acknowledge that this is relatively high. Nevertheless, it also suggests that there is still more to be done if we are to get the buy-in of *everyone* in the sector, and take on the role we think the sector could, and should, be playing in promoting sustainable approaches.

*Source: ibid

Why focus on sustainability? (Cont…)

We were joined in our discussions by Victoria Hands (Environmental & Sustainability Manager, London School of Economics[2] and Susan Nash (Vice President Society and Citizenship, NUS),[3] who worked with us as we explored why sustainability matters to us as students, and what we would like to see in future.

[2]Excelling at sustainability

The London School of Economics and Political Science has made a firm commitment to sustainability, recognising that the School's activities, products and services have environmental, social and economic impacts and aiming to minimise these. All staff and students are involved in working towards this aim and there is lively engagement in progressing towards sustainability, led by a dedicated Sustainability Team.

With a comprehensive Environmental Policy approved at the highest level and supported by the Students' Union, LSE has achieved national recognition – attaining a 'first' in the People & Planet Green League in 2009 and 2010 and providing leadership for other London universities through the London Universities Environmental Group (LUEG).

LSE is home to world-class research centres: the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment; the Centre for Environmental Policy and Governance; the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy; and the Department of Geography and Environment.

Students engage with sustainability in a practical way through the ReLove Scheme, which is expanding from halls of residence throughout campus and ensures reusable items are diverted from landfill. Students have the opportunity to purchase essential items such as stationery and cooking equipment at low cost. In 2008-2009, over 39 tonnes of items, which would have been sent to landfill, were reused at LSE.

They also participate in LSE 100, a compulsory undergraduate course that engages students with sustainability by exploring real problems and 'big' questions which have world-wide economic, environmental and social implications. The first big question is "How should we manage climate change?"

LSE won a Green Gown award in 2010, where it was commended by the judges for its 'exciting and bold whole institution approach. Reflecting a clear commitment and willingness to lead, LSE has created for its students an invaluable trans-disciplinary space.'

For further information, go to http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/environment/

[3]NUS encouraging students to take action

NUS's Ethics and Environment team manage a whole host of forward thinking environmental initiatives across the country, and their flagship behaviour change programme, Degrees Cooler, provides a great example of how NUS is pushing the boundaries to normalise environmental behaviour and green universities across the country.

Sponsored by Defra's Greener Living Fund and running at 20 universities, Degrees Cooler is made up of three inter-related behaviour change projects (Student Switch Off, Going Greener, and Green Impact) which have all been making impressive progress across the four behaviours that the programme aims to positively impact upon; recycling more, saving energy, eating local sustainable food and reducing flying. http://www.nus.org.uk/Campaigns/Green-Zone/Degrees-Cooler/

The EAUC's Green Impact project has been extremely successful this year with over 14,000 university staff working together in over 275 teams to 'green' their departments from the bottom up. The project's achievements can largely be attributed to its celebratory and motivating nature, where staff receive encouragement and recognition for implementing simple actions that promote sustainability in the workplace. Due to popular demand the project is expanding to universities beyond the Degrees Cooler programme next year.

The Student Switch Off energy saving competition has been going from strength to strength with over 15% of all students in participating halls of residence signed up as sustainability advocates who pledge to use their energy more carefully and encourage their peers to do the same. Through various film screenings, quizzes and photo competitions, the project has prevented an impressive 1,000 tonnes of CO2 from being emitted into the atmosphere, proving that if done collectively, small individual actions do count.

Local People & Planet groups have also been busy raising awareness around the four Degrees Cooler behaviours, by organising creative engagement activities during Go Green Week and through the setting up of local university Transition Groups. From recycled fashion shows, and swap shops, to "Meat Free Mondays", and carbon speed dating events, Going Greener has provided staff and students with an amazing variety of ways to get involved in promoting sustainable living on campus.

Why sustainability matters to us as students

We are passionate about sustainability, not just as students, but as people. We appreciate our responsibility to live sustainably, and to work with the natural world rather than against it. Many of us fear that the way we are living now prioritises our immediate needs over the needs of future generations.

As higher education students, sustainability is important to us for several reasons. First, as part of the academic body of our universities, we share responsibility for the significant carbon footprint of the higher education sector, and thus we recognise that we are part of the solution.

Second, within universities, we inhabit spaces where open debate is encouraged and frequent, meaning we are able to help raise sustainability up the agenda.

Finally, we attend institutions that have the skills to create the scientific and educational conditions to enable sustainable living and, as such, we see higher education as having a central role in tackling climate change.

In our discussions, we considered a range of definitions of sustainability: environmental, social and economic. To us, environmental sustainability means living within the means of our finite environmental resources – finding ways to minimise our wasteful use of resources, recycle the resources we do consume and move towards using more renewable energy resources. Social sustainability requires us to act as a community to plan for the future and make changes to the way we live. We feel that although technically economic sustainability can be defined in isolation from environmental sustainability, to a certain extent the two are interdependent, because environmental sustainability will only be *possible* if it is also economically sustainable.

I think universities' economic and ecological sustainability need to be tied up and not in conflict. (NSF member)

How can student representatives and students' unions further support the sustainability agenda?

- **Implement fun, student-led education programmes for fellow students, for example, the Student Switch Off Campaign**
- **Promote a positive image of sustainable living through, for example, the use of role models, positioning it as both aspirational ('cool') and simple to achieve**
- **Purchase union products and services from companies that adhere to tight environmental standards,[4] where possible, and inform students about this practice**
- **Lead student campaigns to raise awareness and put pressure on universities to create and adhere to sustainability strategies**
- **Maximise close working relationships with the local council and government[5]**
- **Promote sustainability amongst union staff and officers, including offering informal or formal learning opportunities**
- **Push sustainability up the student agenda by encouraging debate on sustainability-associated topics**

[4]Ensuring a 'green' supply chain

The NUS has an award-winning supplier assessment and development process that is used to 'green' the student supply chain through its purchasing consortium. It involves 8 steps:

- ethical and environmental statements that set out the NUS's position on a number of ethical and environmental issues
- sound sourcing guide for suppliers
- a rigorous ethical screening process
- all direct suppliers need to complete an Ethical & Environmental Accreditation, a detailed self-assessment that covers many issues of concern and allows the NUS to give all of its suppliers a grade
- a supplier audit process
- ethical break clauses in the NUS's standard terms and conditions of supply
- a reward scheme for first grade suppliers called Sound Ethical Choice
- constructive engagement to exert influence and change the company for the better

For more information see www.nus.org.uk.

[5]Working collaboratively: Students' Unions and local councils

Liverpool Guild of Students worked with Knowsley Council's Love Food Hate Waste team 2010, helping the campaign to promote its core message to the 20,000 students at the University of Liverpool with posters and email shots. They will be looking to work more closely with Love Food Hate Waste in 2010/11, integrating the campaign's objectives alongside the Guild's green initiatives such as the Guild roof garden, and reducing waste in catering outlets.

Rising to the challenge

It is pre-eminently in the universities that we should be thinking hardest about the implications of the whole world-system for our common life and its future, and bringing the best of our available intelligence to bear on the necessary changes. If not there, where? If that's not the business of universities in the early twenty-first century, what on earth are they for?

John Foster, 2007, Source: A University Leaders' Statement of Intent on Sustainable Development (UUK)

In addition to the steps that students can take, universities themselves clearly have a hugely important role to play in supporting the sustainability agenda. We understand that the Carbon Reduction Strategy will require the sector to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020 and by 80% by 2050, against a 1990 deadline.* We also understand that future HEFCE funding will be specifically linked to such targets.

We are delighted to see that leaders within many universities have signed up to UUK statement of intent on sustainable development† – and urge those who have not yet done so to work towards a position where they can, and indeed do prioritise this.

However, we are aware that there is a long way to go. Even in universities where leaders are demonstrating this level of commitment, we are still at a stage where, although all universities may be required to have sustainability strategies, these strategies vary enormously in stringency and/or in the degree of rigour with which they are implemented throughout the organisation as a whole.

You can see symptoms of this with overheated buildings, or lights left on in empty offices, poor recycling facilities – or poor maintenance of those facilities that do exist, and so on.
(NSF member)

*Source: A Carbon Reduction Target and Strategy for Higher Education in England (UUK/GuildHE/HEFCE). 'Scope1' emissions are direct emissions that occur from sources owned or controlled by the organisation; 'scope 2' account for emissions from the generation of purchased electricity consumed by the organisation

†For detail, see: http://www.eauc.org.uk/universities_uk_statement_of_intent

How can universities further support the sustainability agenda?

We would like to see all universities implementing sustainability strategies which commit to: reducing carbon emissions and energy consumption; promoting behaviour change amongst students and staff; and creating the 'sustainability enablers' of the future. We outline some of our suggestions as to how this might be achieved below. Some are strategic, whilst others are simple, 'quick win' steps to improving sustainability – either way, we hope they prove useful when universities are reviewing their strategies.

1. Reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption

- Include a public commitment to a challenging carbon reduction target
- Create detailed university travel plans, with a focus on public transportation, cycling and walking
- Embed environmental concerns in the planning and development of all new-builds,[6] e.g. built-in recycling facilities; installation of water purifiers (to reduce consumption of bottled water)
- Use recycled paper and set printers to print double-sided as the default in academic departments, admin offices and libraries
- Allow essays and papers to be submitted on double sided paper, or electronically, where appropriate
- Ensure buildings are not consuming power when not in use[7]
- Increase the availability of e-books, to complement hard copy resources

[6]Investing in sustainable construction and refurbishment

At over 50 years old, the three tower blocks at the University of Derby's main campus have been transformed into an iconic 'climate gamekeeper'.

The original timber/metal single glazed windows were 'climate poachers', but the campus towers have been dramatically transformed by the introduction of a complete new external cladding or 'thermal coat' as well as the use of architectural integrated wind turbines. This project has improved the towers' energy efficiency, significantly contributed to the university's record of reducing its overall carbon footprint and created a contemporary design that now matches a modern visual identity.

The project also included the installation of over 150 PV cells and 9 architectural integrated wind turbines, producing around 30,000kWh of renewable power year on year – reducing the university's carbon emissions still further. (Green Gown Awards, Winners Brochure, 2010, p.41, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

[7]Reducing unnecessary power-usage

The University of Liverpool found that student walk-up computers were left running all the time, resulting in hundreds of computers on standby in buildings that were closed and locked outside business hours. Built-in Windows power management tools were unsuitable. The university investigated third-party solutions but found that none suited their needs.

Therefore, Liverpool University devised its own method, which uses existing Windows features, simple scripts, and freeware utilities to power off idle computers when nobody is logged on. The resulting solution was named PowerDown. Once distributed, PowerDown immediately avoided more than a million hours of needless uptime per month.

The University has made PowerDown freely available, allowing other organisations, both within the UK and around the world, to get control of their electricity bills and their carbon footprints. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p.23, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

- Incentivise individual departments/buildings to reduce their energy consumption –and energy costs:
  - Install energy meters within each department/building so they are more aware of their consumption
  - Run competitions for energy reduction between departments/buildings
  - Have a sustainability advocate or ambassador in every building/department
- Consider how and when distance learning and remote working can effectively reduce staff and student travel:
  - Enable video conferencing/use of 'Skype' to replace some face-to-face supervision sessions
  - Podcast more lectures, conferences and international meetings so that others can participate, without needing to attend physically
- Encourage staff to develop and model environmentally-friendly behaviours
  - Introduce formal or informal learning opportunities about green issues to raise awareness and motivate[8]
  - Encourage each department to nominate a sustainability ambassador[9]
  - Create guidelines for when international travel by plane is appropriate for academics, with the intention of reducing such travel where this would not unduly impact upon research integrity
- Install and maintain convenient recycling facilities[10]
  - Install recycling facilities within all university buildings and rooms
  - Replace individual desk-side bins with dual recyclable and landfill bins

2. Promote behaviour change amongst students and staff

- Promote a sense of personal responsibility for environmental issues amongst students
  - Install energy meters within student halls
  - Hold annual environmental or sustainability awareness weeks
  - Consider the use of an onsite composter, which would ultimately save on landfill costs

[8]Educating staff to adopt sustainable behaviours

The Liverpool Guild of Students encouraged their cleaning staff to undertake a Level 2 NVQ in Recycling Operations. The cleaners visited a massive recycling plant in the local area, which inspired them to recognise the importance of waste segregation, and to introduce a range of separate bins for different recyclable materials at the Students' Union building. The training has also made the team aware of the impact of chemicals on the environment and the importance of energy conservation. Everything they use is now biodegradable.

[9]Implementing sustainability ambassadors

The University of the West of England has over 100 staff who are directly engaged in sustainability, either as operational managers, sustainability co-ordinators or champions. The university's Sustainability Board recognised the need for broad engagement and behaviour change, and so integrated a whole institution sustainability management structure. They were awarded the prize for continuous improvement and organisational change in this year's Green Gown Awards for their efforts. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p.13, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

[10]Developing university recycling capabilities

Bradford College developed a recycling service, primarily to deal with its own recyclable waste utilising its own resources. After local successes the Porterage team at Bradford College have promoted themselves and the section to be a dynamic real life working example of an innovative recycling service.

The Porterage team at Bradford College instigated internal paper and cardboard recycling collections in 2006 within the facilities department as an alternative to paying external contractors.

The income has been reinvested back into the College with the purchase of an industrial shredding machine. This provides security shredding services for the College and has now expanded to the local University. Some of the shredded paper is sold as animal bedding for horses. The team have expanded to cater for the local business community collecting paper and card and offering shredding services.

Expansion has followed into plastic, wood and metal recycling and now internal food waste by means of composting. A vegetable garden and wormery has been built that will provide the college vegetables to put back into the restaurants. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p.10, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

- Promote 'green careers' through careers departments and advisors
  - Provide training to careers staff on needs of the emerging 'green industries'
  - Collaborate with local councils on green campaign issues to inform and motivate students and staff

3. Support and develop the 'sustainability enablers' of the future

- Increase the focus on environmental and sustainability research projects[11]
- Develop and promote more courses on 'green technologies,' 'green sciences' and 'green entrepreneurialism'[12]
- Promote and offer non-accredited courses and/or modules to interested students, regardless of their major subject area[13]
- Promote work placements and/or summer internships in 'green industries' to students across many disciplines

[11]Supporting research projects into sustainable products

The WATTBOX, developed within the Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development at De Montfort University, began as a topic for a part-time PhD in 2004 and has progressed to a funded research programme and spin-out company.

It is an automated heating control system which:

- learns householders' daily routines and preferences from their use of electricity and hot water;
- uses this information to ensure that heating is only provided when needed and at the minimum temperature needed for comfort;
- is able to manage complex energy sources in the home (such as combined heat and power plants installed with solar hot water heating) so that they are used with maximum efficiency;
- delivers energy savings of about 10-20% relative to conventional controls;
- Improved comfort can be provided to vulnerable people who have difficulty with conventional controls.

The Wattbox can be used in existing housing stock to reduce carbon emissions, improve energy efficiency and deliver savings. The system can also be used to integrate existing and developing technologies such as domestic CHP. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p. 27, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

[12]Implementing courses on environmental awareness

Coventry University offers Environmentally-Aware Graduate modules, which are aimed at students who wish to develop an awareness of environmental issues both personally or in the workplace. The scheme demonstrates the importance of environmental skills to employers and undergraduates. Environmentally-Aware Graduate modules offer students a number of perspectives on the environment and sustainability – from personal carbon impact to fair trade and risk management. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p.31, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

[13]Offering courses on sustainability, regardless of subject area

LSE100 is a compulsory course for incoming undergraduates of the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2010–11 running alongside students' degrees. It introduces students to the fundamental elements of thinking as a social scientist. LSE100 draws on a range of subjects studied at LSE – be it economics, law, philosophy or geography – blending lectures, group classes and written coursework in order to explore real problems and 'big' questions which have world-wide economic, environmental and social implications:

- How should we manage climate change?
- Does culture matter?
- Can we make poverty history?
- Why are great events so difficult to predict?
- What caused the financial crisis?
- Who owns ideas?
- Is population growth a good thing?

The curriculum promotes an interdisciplinary-approach to understanding sustainability-related problems. It enables students to find and assess evidence, interpret and explain competing theories and present arguments persuasively when, for example, finding and presenting economic solutions to climate change. (Green Gown Awards Winners Brochure, 2010, p.20, http://www.eauc.org.uk/home)

What role should government and HE sector bodies play?

It seems as if there are lots of little pockets of activity around the country without any unified political consensus. (NSF Member)

In addition to the sustainability strategies that will be developed and implemented at the institutional level, Government and HE sector bodies will have a critical role to play in ensuring a joined up approach to environmental planning and action, supporting and encouraging the sector to meet challenging targets, and providing incentives to encourage inventive action.

At a national level, we acknowledge that there has been much recent activity to support and drive sustainability in higher education. We very much welcome the 2008 climate change legislation, the subsequent development of the Carbon Reduction Strategy by HEFCE in conjunction with Universities UK and GuildHE and the linking of capital funding to carbon and environmental performance through HEFCE's capital investment framework.* To encourage even greater accountability and focus on sustainability within higher education, we have the following recommendation for Government and national sector bodies.

We recommend that Government and sector bodies incentivise universities to meet strict environmental and sustainability criteria e.g. by expanding the current scope of QAA audits

*For further information, see: http://www.HEFCE.ac.uk/pubs/circlets/2007/cl21_07/

03

Developing a student-centred university

Much of our attention as a Forum has been focused on the ways in which various aspects of higher education – whether Teaching and Learning, Student Finance or Information, Advice and Guidance – can become more student-focused. Therefore, as a culmination of our work over the past three years, we felt it would be useful to build a picture of what a genuinely student-centred university looks like.

We are aware that, in these straitened financial times, universities will have to consider priorities carefully. However, much of what we outline below is not so much dependent upon an increase in resources as a cultural shift towards putting the student experience at the heart of service design. We urge universities to use this as a benchmark against which to measure current provision within their particular institution, and to inform thinking about priorities for improvement.

Why focus on a student-centred university?

As students today, we have high expectations of the quality and personalisation of our overall university experience. These expectations have probably been influenced by a number of factors: the introduction of tuition fees; an increased focus on 'customer satisfaction' across public services in general; and technological advances that have enabled greater personalisation of certain types of products and services in the wider commercial world. As a result, we tend to view any 'one size fits all' model as outdated and inflexible, especially when considering the increasing diversity of students in higher education (for example, full-time and part-time; mature and younger; distance learners).

There has been a cultural shift within wider society as a result of market-based forces. We have moved from an age of difference to an age of individuality – and we expect to be treated as such! (NSF member)

We fully acknowledge that the student-university relationship is more nuanced and more reciprocal than a simple customer-provider relationship, and that there are obligations on both sides. Nevertheless, the fact that we now pay tuition fees means that there is more of a sense of 'exchange' than was previously the case, and this impacts upon the quality of service we expect. We recognise that as students we are active participants, rather than passive consumers of education. We also believe that, at the very least, our higher education experience should demonstrate value for money and that our universities should put us, as students, at the heart of how they think and work.

We can see that many universities have wholeheartedly embraced this challenge, and transformed the ways in which they work in response to this shift. In this chapter, we are delighted to highlight some universities who are clearly putting the student experience at the top of their agenda already. For example, in developing our thinking in this area, we heard from the University of East London, which achieved the Customer Service Excellence Standard* in 2006 for its 'Students First Initiative,'[14] a university wide approach to delivering excellent levels of service. Underlying principles of its programme include a commitment to involving students in all service design, the streamlining of students' contact with the university, and the creation of new channels aimed at improving communication between the university and the student.

[14]Centralising the position of students

The Students First Initiative (SFI) at the University of East London (UEL) represents an integrated and co-ordinated approach to enhancing the student experience. The initiative ran across academic years 2008-9 and 2009-10, and was built on the sharing of good practice between schools and services with the explicit objective of establishing a richer and more equitable experience for all students. The initiative arose from a Dean and Director Away Day, where tried and tested good practice was translated into a series of actions to be comprehensively implemented over a short, medium and longer-term period. Nominated "champions" (senior staff) were tasked with co-ordinating, supporting and monitoring implementation within their school or service.

SFI was built around key themes: 'Engagement and Achievement'; 'A Sense of Belonging and Pride'; and 'Support and Fun,' and established a number of key achievements:

- A 'Starting' memory key was produced and given to all new students and contained the key information and web-links required to help them settle in. The approach was extremely user-friendly and access was gained by simply plugging it into a computer
- Text-tools was introduced into schools and services to provide a rapid, mass communication system to students via their mobile phones. A single email texts information to large groups of students at the touch of a button
- Promotion of the establishment of 'virtual schools' using wikis etc so that students could engage with both staff and fellow students without being physically on campus. Particularly useful at the start of programmes to establish a sense of belonging and group identity

There were many other successful outcomes of the SFI, but perhaps the most significant was a collective recognition of the need for, and value of, a strategic and integrated approach to the student experience.

*The Customer Service Excellence Standard is a government initiative, which recognises customer service excellence in public services organisations, including universities. The standard is intended to drive continuous improvement; to develop skills in customer service, and to independently validate achievement.

Why focus on a student-centred university? (Cont…)

However, there are still some of us – from a broad spectrum of university types – who do not feel that this is yet the case at all institutions. Our experiences can sometimes include: a lack of transparency; excessive and unexplained waiting times for feedback; a lack of access to staff; and inflexible systems or staff.

Sometimes it can feel as though you are being made to fit into a system, or service or whatever, that was not originally designed with students in mind! (NSF member)

Students now have a greater choice of university than ever. With the review of student finance in higher education currently in progress, we do not know what the future looks like with regard to tuition fees or more market-based approaches amongst universities. However we suspect that, if you are a university, demonstrating your commitment to meeting the diverse needs and expectations of students is likely to be more important than ever.

We outline what that might look like below, and hope universities will use this as a prompt for their thinking when reviewing systems and approaches within their respective institutions.

What do we mean by 'customer service' in HE?

We acknowledge that students are active participants in, not passive consumers of, their education. We're not saying that just because we're paying we are customers of our lecturers, it's not as crude as that… where we talk about 'customer service' in HE, it's more about a service where the person feels valued and treated as an individual. (NSF Member)

In our view, organisations that have a strong customer service ethos:

- communicate effectively with their customers, and provide high quality and easily accessible information
- tailor their services to their customers' needs
- regularly assess customer feedback, and improve their services as a result
- employ professional and friendly staff who put their customers first
- effectively resolve problems and disputes
- deliver services and respond to customers in a timely fashion

What role should students play in a student-centred university?

We recognise that as students we have a role to play in ensuring we realise the benefits our universities offer us and in helping our universities become more student-centred. We need to:

- **be responsible for our own affairs, for example, our own finances**
- **ask for help when we need it**
- **get involved:**
  - **when universities ask for student feedback, take the time to respond**
  - **get involved with our students' unions**
- **comply with all reasonable systems**

Our approach

We have generated 'stories' of positive experiences for students when engaging with various aspects of a university. We recognise that many of these do not demonstrate ground-breaking moments of innovation; rather, we hope they are useful in encouraging universities to think through their practices from the perspective of students in an empathetic and systematic way.

We have also outlined our expectations of key services or aspects of the student experience, against which we invite individual institutions to measure their current practice. These include:

1. Student Services
2. Finance Office
3. Administrative System
4. Accommodation Services
5. The overall Teaching & Learning experience

We readily acknowledge that many universities and colleges may already be implementing some of these practices, but urge all institutions to consider whether adopting new ways of working and/or reviewing the extent to which guidance is being implemented in practice, could lead to further improvements in this area.

A student-centred university requires a productive and collaborative relationship between the university and its students.

It requires an institution to:

Value its students, and demonstrate this by:

- understanding the core values of its students
- placing a great emphasis on staff and student relations in all areas
- giving a tailored service

Communicate well with its students, by:

- promoting a clear complaints procedure – and resolving problems effectively
- tracking information – and keeping students informed
- setting and managing expectations: ensuring students are clear about what to expect, and what's expected of them
- listening to students – and responding!

Promote excellent levels of service, by:

- using its current 'picture' of students to cross-refer (e.g. recommend other suitable courses, signpost to related services)
- establishing and promoting a sense of community

What does a student-centred university look like?

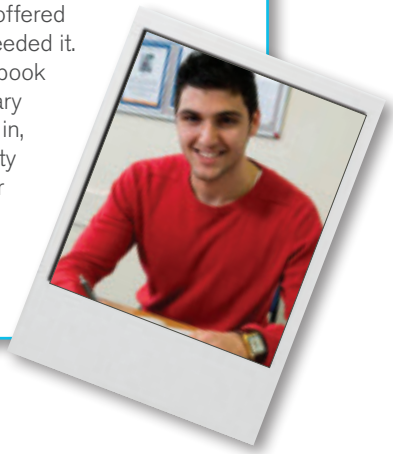
A positive experience when engaging with the recruitment and admissions office

Patrick is the first in his family to go to university. At school, he had always done relatively well and started thinking about university after a local university visited his school. He was invited to a one-week summer placement at this university, which he loved and emerged committed to attending university.

Patrick received a small bursary to visit two or three universities during his last year of school. On those days, Patrick met a number of current students, and managed to get a good idea of what university study actually involved, and what his chosen course might be like. When he came to apply, he accessed accurate and comprehensive information on his university's online admissions page.

Patrick was able to sort out his accommodation and his bursaries through a combination of phone support and online communication. He received reassurance from the university about his concerns with fees and finance, and he ultimately received his bursary on time.

Throughout Patrick's induction week, staff were always friendly and welcoming, and he was happy to have one named member of staff who he could get in contact with about almost any issue. Registration was easy because the forms were self-explanatory, and he was offered assistance, should he have needed it. He was given a student handbook that contained all the necessary information to help him settle in, and also valued the opportunity to access support from a peer mentor during this critical early stage.



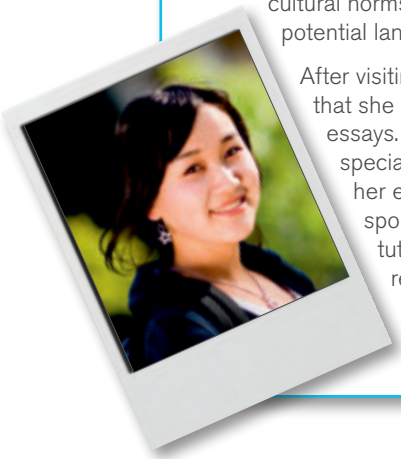
A positive experience when engaging with an academic department

Mei is an international student. She is very happy with her decision to study in England and, despite the academic and cultural differences between here and her home country, feels she is progressing in leaps and bounds because of the advice and support she has been able to access. Most importantly, Mei feels a great sense of satisfaction from her ability to learn from her mistakes and she knows that each time she is assessed she is improving. She largely attributes this to her tutors, who always take the time to give her feedback on her assessments in a way she can understand.

While Mei knows that not all students on her course receive their feedback in person, she has been grateful that all of her tutors have agreed to see her when she has emailed them an appointment request. She finds it extremely beneficial to receive feedback orally, as well as in writing, so she can probe for further detail where necessary.

When Mei does meet her tutors, they provide her with constructive feedback and targeted ways to improve on each subsequent attempt; she is also aware that, where necessary, they take into account cultural norms for her country and any potential language barriers.

After visiting one tutor, Mei realised that she had a problem structuring her essays. Her tutor referred her to a special study skills tutor, who helped her enormously. Her original tutor spoke to the special studies skills tutor about Mei's progress. As a result, Mei feels she is now a competent essay writer, and her marks reflect this.



Putting students at the heart of service thinking: how does your institution measure up?

1. Student services[15]

- inclusive for, and accessible to, all students, regardless of their age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation[16]
- highly pro-active in promoting its services and produces communication materials in a variety of accessible formats
- places strong emphasis on staff being good listeners, and offering a responsive and personalised service
- ensures staff are available to students in a variety of ways, including web chats
- co-designs its services with students, and works in conjunction with the students' union and various student societies
- protects students' data and ensures anonymity where appropriate
- 'joins up the dots', signposting students to specialist services and promoting collaboration between different areas and services[17]

2. Student Finance Services

- fair
  - for example, committed to setting fees for international students at a fair level and explaining the rationale for this level
- flexible
  - offers students a choice about when and how to pay tuition fees
- transparent
  - about how student fees are spent, and how this works with other sources of income
  - about all costs including books, equipment, trips, living expenses including accommodation, food, travel and insurance, so that students can make informed decisions right from the start
- promotes social equality
  - targets bursaries to meet financial needs, rather than rewarding performance
- demonstrates an active commitment to securing the best outcomes for students
  - staff are accessible and friendly
  - staff are willing to help students with bursary applications or other applications for financial support

[15]Putting students first in Student Services

At Coventry University, Student Services offer a support network for all students to access. It doesn't matter if the student is full or part-time, undergraduate or post-graduate – support is given to all.

The department is divided into two main sections; Central Support Services and Health and Wellbeing.

It is important from a University perspective that the best possible student experience is offered. To address this, it listened to students' comments and, in 2004, built a dedicated £5m Student Centre to ensure it had a one-stop-shop for all their needs. The University felt it was important to have all its central services located in one building.

The Student Centre has been very well-received by the students and this was endorsed in the 2009 internal Report of the Student Experience at Coventry University.

However, Student Services are continually being evaluated and bench-marked against other Universities to ensure that the services it offers not only meet the needs of its own students but also meet the national standards.

Following the success of the Student Centre, Student Services has been working closely with all areas of Health and Wellbeing and the Students' Union and it is this good working relationship which will make it possible to relocate the two departments into one custom-made student building.

The University is investing £160m in redeveloping the campus and a new Student Building is on course to open in June 2011, which will not only enhance the student experience, but provide a much-needed central location for student activity.

Student Services at Coventry has now been recognised by the UK Government through the EMQC and in March 2010 it successfully completed and attained the kite mark for Customer Service Excellence.

[16]Implementing inclusive approaches for international students

- Bournemouth University invites its new international students on a trip to local supermarkets and shops, and it runs workshops on visa legalities where help is given to students who need to fill in visa application forms etc.
- Newcastle University offers a meet and greet service to its international students, picking them up from the airport and taking them directly to their accommodation
- The University of Sheffield runs an orientation week for international students the week before 'Freshers' Week'

[17]Joining up services

At the University of Liverpool, student services are centrally located on campus, with all services in one building including the accommodation office, the careers service and the academic support service.

3. Administration services and systems

- accessible to all students
  - able to provide information in a variety of formats that students can readily access and that does not contain jargon
  - geographically central[18]
  - physically accessible for all students, including disabled students
  - an excellent online presence so information can be accessed 24 hours a day
- responsive
  - agrees its opening hours in consultation with students
  - committed to responding to students' queries quickly and clearly
- pro-actively communicates
  - committed to meeting students' needs and providing them with all the information they need to work out what they're meant to do, when and where
- open to suggestions about new ways of working
- committed to keeping bureaucracy to a minimum

4. Student Accommodation Services*

- impartial
  - success is measured by finding the right accommodation for the particular student, not by filling rooms
- inclusive, accessible to, and respectful of, all students regardless of their age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation
- honest
  - its advertising should not imply that its best accommodation is standard, or that all accommodation provided by the university is like the one in the brochures or website if this isn't the case
- actively seeks feedback from students and uses this to help inform the service it provides
- knowledgeable and well-informed
  - about area and transportation links
  - about private landlords and properties
  - about different welfare agencies and contacts
  - about the entitlement of different types of students (e.g. disabled students)
- pro-active in promoting a positive image of students to local communities to support better social cohesion

[18]Being accessible to students

At the University of Liverpool, the administration building ('The Foundation Building') is directly opposite the Students' Guild to promote, encourage and recognise its central role in student university life.

*The outline above complements and builds upon our work last year, in which we created a vision of an ideal student accommodation service. See NSF Annual Report 2009, p. 86-87 for detail.

Putting students at the heart of service thinking: how does your institution measure up? (Cont…)

Student accommodation services offer: an NSF checklist

☐ comprehensive pre-arrival information, for example:

- university owned and private accommodation options, including an up-to-date list of reputable private landlords
- costs (including overheads)
- accessible accommodation
- transport links in the local area (e.g. including distances from key services, buildings of worship)
- environmental issues in relation to energy efficiency
- a guide on 'what to look out for' when looking for accommodation (e.g. common pitfalls around contracts; unexpected costs; rent negotiation opportunities)
- information on contract-checking services
- advice on how to complain if things go wrong, both in private and university-owned accommodation
- information on how to express a preference for where you would like to be accommodated (e.g. mixed/single sex; with other international students/integrated)
- general information about the local community (e.g. councillors; local community groups)

☐ a commitment to meeting individual student preferences for accommodation where possible – and to promoting the option for students to express this

☐ opening hours that are not restricted to 9am-4pm during term time

☐ 360° virtual tours of a range of university-owned accommodation (not just the best rooms) to enable all students (including international and disabled students) to choose accommodation without having to visit the campus

☐ excellent information for students wishing to rent privately including:

- annual lists of well maintained properties, 'good' landlords, and black listed landlords, in the private sector
- information on the right to negotiate on rent
- a contract-checking service for students wishing to rent privately
- information on the secure deposit scheme and council tax

Student accommodation services offer: an NSF checklist

☐ systematic feedback mechanisms so that students can inform the provision of accommodation and accommodation services

- e.g. seek international students' views on whether they would like their accommodation to be segregated, or integrated with home students

☐ a commitment to providing/sourcing and promoting adequate affordable accommodation, and a range of types of accommodation to suit the range of student budgets

☐ widespread promotion of the university's policy for tackling accommodation that is not fit for purpose

☐ an arbitration service for students who come into conflict with their landlords

Putting students at the heart of service thinking: how does your institution measure up? (Cont…)

5. The overall Teaching and Learning experience

We have built on our work on teaching and learning last year to create a vision of a student-centred teaching and learning experience. If a university is getting this right, a student should be able to say:

- Before I arrived, I knew broadly what to expect
- I feel supported in my learning
- My lecturers are trained, supported and incentivised to teach me well
- I am inspired and challenged
- Assessment and feedback are used to improve my achievement in future, not just judge my performance to date

Before I arrive, I know what to expect

I can access information and advice about:

- what will be expected of me, and to what extent study will be structured or independent
- any major academic or cultural differences between studying here and my home country (if I am an international student), how I can prepare for this and how I can access support once I arrive
- if learning is mostly independent, the key skills I will need to develop – and the opportunities that will be available to support me in developing these
- course content and structure
- approximately how many 'contact' hours my subject is likely to involve – and what is meant by this
- who will be teaching me (experienced lecturers, well-known researchers or postgraduate students – or a mix of the three?)
- the extent to which my lecturers will be available for one-to-one support
- the learning support that will be available to me, given my individual needs (e.g. dyslexia tests and support for disabled students, IT support for distance learners studying online)
- the kind of study resources available, including any resources for disabled students like transcription services for visually impaired students
- how long the library is open for, and what resources within the library I will be entitled to
- the extent to which I can 'shape' my course through module choice
- if I need to undertake a placement, the resources I can access and the support that will be available to me e.g. what the level of contact from my university will be

Before I go, I have been able to develop a good idea of what teaching and learning will be like via:

- HE preparation events/seminars at sixth form colleges and schools, including a possible role for students' unions and student ambassadors to talk about academic study at HE level
- sessions during university open days or induction weeks on the nature of independent study and the expectations placed on students
- 'returning to learning' courses that develop transferable study skills, especially if I am a mature student
- subject specific supplements to university prospectuses
- 'alternative prospectuses' created by students, distributed with the main university prospectus

I feel supported in my learning

I can:

- attend a session on *'Using Study Resources'* on arrival to orient myself, which is available in person or online, via video link, and through online tasks
- attend a specialised induction course or day, if I am a disabled student
- choose to participate in a series of sessions to develop my independent study skills, especially if (perhaps as a mature learner) I have been out of study for a long time or if (perhaps as an international student) I am used to a more structured approach
- access an advice and skills service that will help in developing my writing skills, researching and writing dissertations, and time management
- access any learning support that I might need as a disabled student – and benefit from this support as soon as my course begins
- use libraries, services and other study resources that are open at appropriate times, regardless of whether I am studying full or part-time, and accessible, regardless of any disability or learning difficulty I may have
- participate in a dedicated support programme to develop my skills and confidence in using technology. This might include:
  - induction courses
  - student-led laptop trouble-shooting
  - IT training sessions
- access essential ICT resources, for example
  - free broadband
  - a resource pool of computer equipment that can be borrowed; ensure all students have access to computer facilities
  - accessible websites and course material
  - assistive technology, and e-books for disabled students
- use a personal development plan to map and develop key skills

My lecturers are trained, supported and incentivised to teach well

- all teaching staff undertake formal training that is aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework
- after initial training, staff participate in continuing professional development programmes for teaching
- lecturers are properly supported and trained in how to tailor their teaching for different students' needs – whether accommodating for learning difficulties, impairments, and different learning styles, or for distance learners and mature learners
- there is a dedicated support programme for lecturers to develop skills and confidence in using technology through a CPD framework that encourages and rewards staff development in this area
- all departments offer a range of teaching or teaching-related opportunities for postgraduates (e.g. assisting a more senior lecturer, assisting smaller groups in lab work etc, preparing lectures and lecture materials) to provide experience before they take responsibility for teaching a class
- postgraduate teachers are given full training, induction, and ongoing support by a departmental mentor that includes regular observation and feedback
- the promotion criteria for my lecturers are formally linked to achievement against the UK Professional Standards Framework

Putting students at the heart of service thinking: how does your institution measure up? (Cont…)

I am inspired and challenged

- if I am studying a vocational course in particular, theory and practice are combined to consolidate my learning as early as possible, in contexts where poor practical knowledge does not constitute a risk
- guest lecturers from the field/industry are brought in to inspire me and demonstrate course relevancy
- I am able to select or suggest some topics, which stimulates interest amongst my peers
- some modules are co-ordinated across departments to help me make appropriate connections beyond my main degree
- my lecturers personalise and differentiate their teaching approaches to take account of impairments, learning difficulties and learning styles
- lecture notes are provided if I am studying a subject which is heavily factual/detailed (e.g. a medical theory lecture), and accessible electronic lecture notes are available for disabled students in all lectures
- traditional teaching methods are complemented or enhanced with new technology, for example, using podcasts and new assistive technology for disabled students
- there is an open door policy in place at all lectures (space permitting), so I can attend lectures in disciplines relevant to my subject or that I have a particular interest in

Assessment and feedback is used to improve my achievement in future – not just judge my achievement to date

- there is a university-wide focus on assessment for, not just of, learning
- the assessment process is transparent and impartial e.g.
  - criteria are transparent
  - papers are anonymous and double-marked for key assessments
- technology is used to enable innovative methods of assessment, where this adds value: e.g.
  - I can respond to questions orally using audio-recording software in supervised rooms
  - group work is tracked using technology which enables the assessor to see what individual students have contributed
- marked examinations and assessments are returned to me, so I can learn from my mistakes
- I have a choice of feedback methods to suit my mode of study, and any disability I may have, e.g.
  - screen capture software is used to provide visual and audio feedback, which especially benefits some disabled students
- feedback is given in plain English
- there is a reasonable level of consistency in feedback between different academics and academic departments
- I can access skills sessions on how to use feedback to improve

As a postgraduate student…

- I am encouraged to map and develop my skills needs (e.g. through a personal development plan)
- I have the opportunity to participate in a GRADschool at my, or a nearby, institution to reflect upon and develop the transferable skills I am developing
- I can access academic peer support through a postgraduate ambassador scheme
- I am supervised by a team of supervisors, rather than just individuals, where possible, and I see my supervisors according to guidelines detailing standard frequency of meetings
- I am encouraged to participate in a range of optional events important to my academic development including conference attendance, presenting papers, additional research projects, editing books and joining wider academic networks and forums
- I am offered a range of teaching-related opportunities (e.g. assisting a more senior lecturer, assisting smaller groups in lab work etc, preparing lectures and lecture materials) before being expected to take full responsibility for delivering certain elements of the course
- I am given full training, induction, and ongoing support to develop my teaching skills, including:
  - a clear understanding of the seven principles of good teaching*
  - regular observation of my teaching and feedback from my departmental mentor
  - the opportunity to observe, and be observed by, my peers
  - the opportunity to observe more experienced lecturers

*Understanding the seven principles of good teaching

According to 'A framework for the review of teaching', a good teacher:

1. Encourages contact between students and staff
2. Develops reciprocity and co-operation amongst students
3. Encourages active learning
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasises time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

Further information can be accessed at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id478_framework_for_review_of_teaching.pdf

04

Next steps: leveraging the Forum's legacy

During our three years of operation as a Forum, we have played a part in influencing policy direction and in providing evidence to support the improvement agendas of various sector organisations. We strongly believe that the new Government, individual institutions and sector organisations should continue to listen to, and collaborate with, a diverse range of students, in meaningful and inclusive ways.

However, we feel that the potential for a real and lasting legacy for our work will be as a result of our focus on the improvement measures that can be taken *locally* and at an institutional level.

We believe that there are two ways in which universities might achieve this:

- by 'benchmarking' their provision against our visions and suggested practice for universities, across the wide range of topics we have covered
- by considering how similar student listening initiatives might be implemented at a local level

We fully acknowledge the excellent work that is already being undertaken by many institutions in conjunction with students' unions to affect a strong relationship between universities and students. It is clearly important that universities encourage involvement from a diverse range of students to improve current provision. We therefore recommend that individual institutions (working with students' unions as appropriate) consider complementing existing mechanisms with a range of student listening initiatives via which they can hear from as wide a range of students as possible.

1. 'Benchmarking' current provision

At the University of Sheffield Students' Union, the officers used the NSF report as a form of checklist; to see where we were already enjoying best practice to share with other students' unions and also to see where more work needed to be done at the University.

Paul Tobin, SU President 09/10

Many universities have already reported using the visions and 'suggestions for universities' sections to help them review their provision and practice in a number of areas. For example, **Leeds Trinity University College** informed us that they are using the NSF report in a variety of ways:

The NSF report was helpful in guiding our thinking around key objectives. We have reviewed our Strategic Plan and have two main strands, one of which is excellence. The report was helpful in several ways – one was in confirming that we are correct in the approach we are taking to Strategic Planning. Our other strand is sustainability; the two are inextricably linked […]. The section on accommodation has been used by the Director of Hospitality as a guide when looking at our practice.[19]

We therefore urge all universities to systematically revisit and review our previous reports, and consider how their current provision 'measures up' to the ideal visions and outlines of suggested practice that we have provided for universities during the course of our work.

The table below provides a summary of topics covered in previous reports*

Topic	2008	2009	2010
Information, Advice and Guidance	✓		
Student Finance	✓		
International student experience	✓		
Employability	✓	✓	
Disabled student experience	✓	✓	
Postgraduate student experience	✓	✓	
Mature and part-time student experience		✓	
Teaching and Learning (including e-learning)		✓	✓
Accommodation		✓	✓
Sustainability			✓
Student-centred university			✓

[19]Using the NSF report to improve services

"At Leeds Trinity University College, we have undertaken a review of Learning Resources and the impact on teaching and learning. We used the NSF report on teaching (including e – learning) as part of a seminar with staff. It was very helpful. The outcomes of the seminar were used in strategic discussions to help us focus on four key projects:

- Inspirational Teaching
- Assessment and Feedback
- Facilitating e-communications with students
- Provide learning resources that support learning, teaching, assessment and the curriculum.

The section on accommodation has been used by the Director of Hospitality to help with his work in appropriate areas. He was very pleased with the NSF work, which he has been using as a guide. Our Students' Union was involved in all of this, including taking part in the seminars, and was able to provide useful feedback."

*Access the NSF 2008 and 2009 reports from www.bis.gov.uk/studentexperience

2. Implementing similar student listening initiatives at a local level

The NSF has provided a successful model for inclusive collaboration and consultation, enabling and encouraging a wide range of students – including those whose voices are not always the most easily heard – to get involved in the review and design of the services, policy and practice that affects them.

In addition to student representative structures already in place, we would urge individual universities (working in conjunction with students' unions as appropriate) to consider how they might implement a broader range of student listening initiatives – e.g. student forums, student juries, student focus groups – that encourage involvement from students in all their diversity. In general, such initiatives:

- Aim to capture and reflect the diversity of student voices and experiences
- Place a strong emphasis on working processes that promote collaborative and constructive dialogue
- Employ an inclusive and accessible approach that does not require any particular sector expertise of participants, but rather draws on their experience and expertise in 'what it is like to be a student' and therefore what could be improved
- Usually require a commitment from the organisation itself to participate constructively in discussions, provide additional information, where helpful, and to provide a response to the suggestions that are made.

NSF impact

Information, Advice and Guidance

- NSF was invited to share its recommendations at a range of national IAG – themed conferences
- JISC is currently funding the 1994 Group to undertake research into the feasibility of the NSF's recommendation for a 'one stop IAG portal'
- The NSF recommendation for improved pre-entry information was picked up in 'Higher Ambitions,' requiring universities to publish a standard set of information
- 'The Times Higher' article, '*This involves what exactly?',* used the NSF report as evidence to show the information provided by universities to applicants is not always as clear as it might be

Teaching and Learning

- 'The Independent' quoted extensively from the Teaching and Learning chapter of the 09 Annual Report in its article *'Why students want their universities to do better'*
- *HEFCE has promised to give consideration to the NSF's recommendations in this area as it re-considers its role in supporting teaching and learning nationally. In addition, it will work with the sector to ensure institutional strategies include information about appointment and promotion criteria in relation to pedagogy.* (New People Management Framework)

Employability

- 'Higher Ambitions' picked up the NSF recommendation for universities to publish an employability strategy

Postgraduate study

- 'The Postgraduate Review' acknowledged the NSF as a major contributor towards its thinking
- 'The Independent' quoted extensively from the Postgraduate Student chapter in the 09 Annual Report in *Serena's story: How one student is demanding a better deal for postgraduates* (November 2009)

Appendix A NSF: remit, membership and ways of working

Role and remit

The National Student Forum (NSF) was established in early 2008, to provide students in higher education with an enhanced voice in the development of the policies that affect them. The aim of the NSF was to provide the government and partner organisations with direct access to the views of students from a wide range of backgrounds and study environments. Its remit was to:

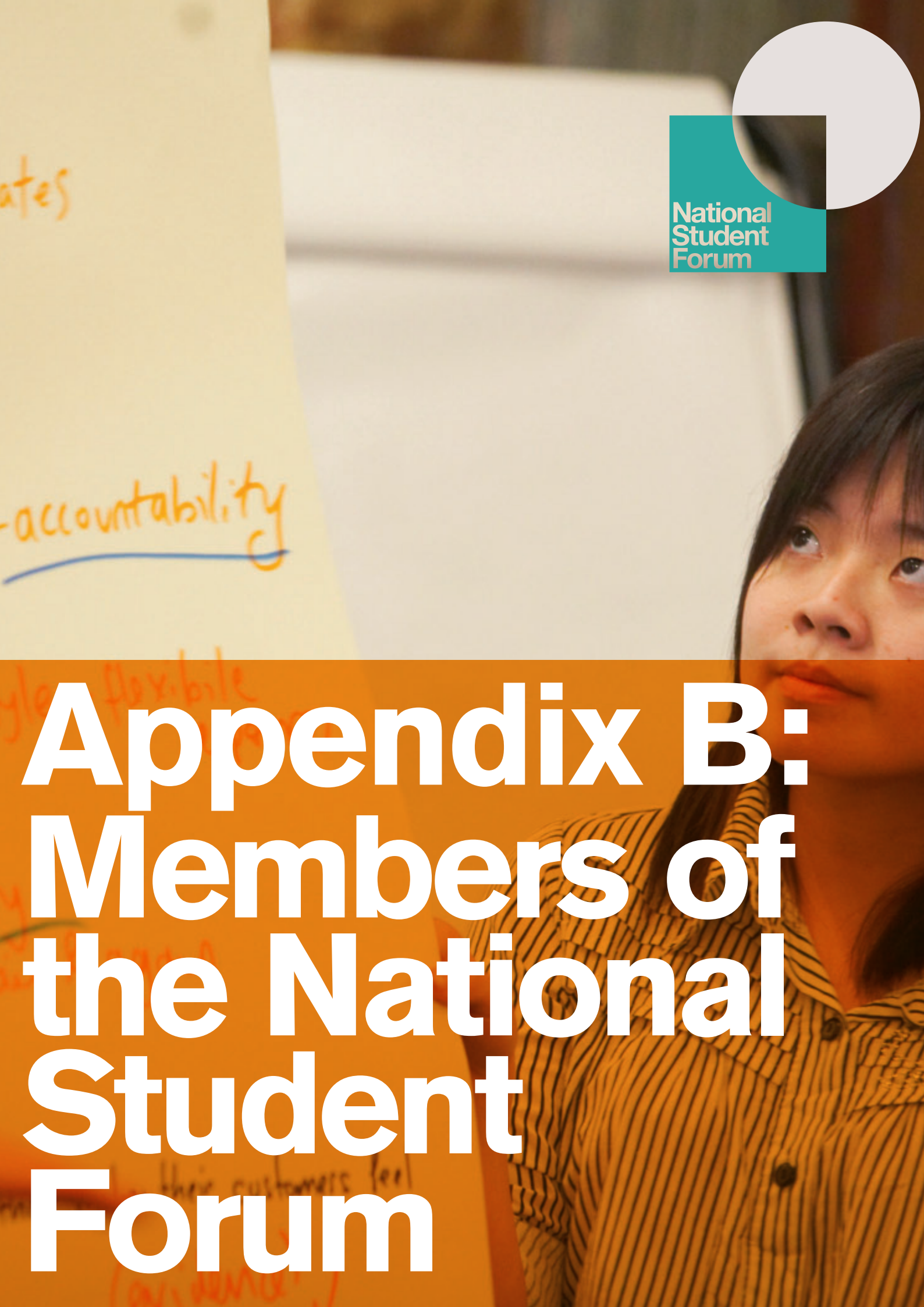
- advise Government on the reasonable expectations of students
- provide a student perspective on emerging policy areas, feeding views to policymakers
- help evaluate the impact of existing policies on students in different circumstances
- initiate discussion on areas of potential policy interest for the NSF or for Government
- produce an annual report for Ministers' attention and comment, which includes recommendations for Government

Forum ways of working

The NSF set its own agenda, and the full Forum met four times over the course of the academic year. In addition, subgroup meetings were held to discuss complex issues in more depth. During the academic year 09-10, three such subgroups were held on:

- sustainability
- teaching and learning
- review of progress

Meetings were regularly attended by Ministers, policymakers and partner organisations, in accordance with the topic selected by the Forum. Members, on occasion, agreed to requests to participate in sector consultations. This year the NSF contributed to HEFCE's review of the National Student Survey and the 1994 Group's project to develop a one-stop-shop IAG portal; the latter is being undertaken in response to the Forum's recommendation for an IAG portal in its 2008 report. Members' views on these topics have been informally given to the policy and project leads directly.



Appendix B: Members of the National Student Forum

Maeve Sherlock, NSF Chair

I am currently at Durham University doing research for my doctorate on the subject of the interface between Faith and the State in modern Britain. Until October 2006, I was Chief Executive of the Refugee Council and previous to this, spent three years as a member of the Council of Economic Advisers in the Treasury on issues including child poverty, labour markets and the Third Sector. During the 2007 Spending Review, I chaired an Advisory Panel advising ministers on the future role of the Third Sector in economic and social regeneration. Before moving to the Treasury, I was Chief Executive of the charity One Parent Families, director of UKCOSA (Council of International Education) and President of the National Union of Students. In 2010 I joined the House of Lords as a life peer.

Samina Sabir, NSF Vice-Chair

My name is Samina Sabir and I recently completed a PGCE at Anglia Ruskin University. I am now a qualified primary school teacher. Previous to this I did a degree in Education and Early childhood Studies at Roehampton University. I have always had a keen interest in education and the theory and history that underpin how education works in today's society.

I was very active within Roehampton University as I worked for the Students' Union as Welfare Officer and a teacher of R.O.A.Ds trained by NUS, whereby I taught key skills to other students. I was a Sport and Wellbeing Ambassador and have been a student representative for both Anglia Ruskin and Roehampton University. I was one of 200 students from the UK selected on to the Study China Programme with DIUS and travelled to Lithuania to learn about access to learning around Europe with SKILLS. From these opportunities I have learnt many new skills and gained valuable experiences.

Serena Trowbridge, NSF Vice – Chair

I am a PhD student at Birmingham City University, having obtained a Masters from the University of Birmingham and a BA (Hons) in English Literature and Language from King's College London. My thesis is entitled "Christina Rossetti's Fractured Gothic" and considers the effect on the work of Rossetti of Gothic literature. I am also the editor of the Review of the Pre-Raphaelite Society, and I am currently undertaking some teaching at Birmingham City University. I am a school governor and take a strong interest in secondary and higher education. I have been involved with the NSF since its inception, and am particularly interested in aspects of learning and teaching, and postgraduate issues. For the past year, I have served as Vice-Chair of the Forum.

Graham Bates

My name is Graham Bates. I live in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. I completed my A-Levels in 2005 at Plantsbrook School. I had 2 years out of education working within the customer service sector of local government. I applied for University in 2007 as I felt I would like to go down the career path of being a primary school teacher. I was accepted at Newman University College to study a BSc in Geography and ICT.

I joined the National Student Forum in June 2008. During my time on the Forum I have met some very interesting people and have made some great friends. I enjoy discussing issues with the Forum and creating recommendations.

Charlie Bell

I am 21 years of age and am studying Medicine at Queens' College, Cambridge, where I was recently elected JCR President (an office I hold whilst continuing with my studies). I am using this role to increase the cohesion between students and senior teaching fellows at the college, together with ensuring the student experience at one of the world's top universities remains at its peak. I am very honoured to be able to sit on the Forum, and hope that the work that has come from a very productive year will be used to improve the way young people develop through their studies nationwide. I was fortunate to lead a delegation to the Model United Nations in The Hague, and have since appeared on BBC1's Question Time, winning the position of Student Panellist in 2007. I have also written for The Guardian and various university newspapers.

George K Charonis

I first moved to the UK in 2006 to study at the University of Bath, graduating in 2009 with a BSc in Physics. From July 2009 to June 2010 I served as Vice-President (Education) of the University of Bath Students' Union.

I am a member of the Student Sounding Board for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK. I am also a member of the European Co-ordination Group for the National Union of Students. Since July 2010, I have also been a member of the UK Bologna Experts team. I'm currently a member of the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) for the European Students' Union (ESU), working specifically on the topics of financing of higher education, student centered learning and equality.

From October 2010 I will be a student again, studying for a MSc in Climate Change and Policy at the University of Sussex.

I have greatly enjoyed being a member of the National Student Forum, having the opportunity to work with students from across the country, sharing experiences and exchanging information about what it means to be a student in the UK.

Yee Xian Choi

I am a medical student from Malaysia currently studying at Newcastle University. Coming to the UK to further my studies three years ago was definitely a life-changing experience for me. Besides gaining knowledge from lecturers to clinical bedside teachings, I have now learned to become a learner, which is essential for my future career as a doctor.

I am having a good time making friends and getting to know British culture. I hope the diversity created between different cultures can contribute towards a better outcome, especially in helping to improve the HE sector in the UK through the work of the NSF.

Ros Evans

I have just been awarded my BSc (Hons) in Natural Science with Biology from the Open University with whom I have been studying since 2000. I am continuing to study some of the shorter, science related courses during my term as the President of the Open University Student Association, which began in April 2009.

As a distance, part-time learner, I juggle study with home and full-time employment, as do many of the 220,000 students who study with the Open University. I am grateful to be able to bring the issues affecting these students to the attention of decision makers through membership of the National Student Forum. Many of these issues are unique to distance, part-time learners, but we also share many of the problems encountered by full-time students.

I have previously been Vice President Equal Opportunities for OUSA, and my interest in equal opportunities for all students continues, along with the need to maintain the quality of education and support during this difficult financial time.

Natalie Foster

I graduated with a Law degree from Brunel University in 2008 and am currently a part-time Bar Vocational Course student at BPP Law School in London. As an aspiring barrister I received a substantial scholarship from The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple to study at BPP.

I am currently the President and a trustee of the Union of Brunel Students; an elected position responsible for representing the academic and welfare needs and interests of over 14,000 home and international students at Brunel University. As the President I am heavily involved in heading up the Union's campaigns and I am also heavily involved in NUS campaigns and helping to strengthen student representation nationally.

I enjoy volunteering and have participated in a variety of activities within my local community and University. I have been a mentor for under achieving young people, I also sat on the Merton Youth Offending Team Referral Order panels and I have been the Events Coordinator for the Brunel University's African and Caribbean Society (ACS), the largest ACS in the country.

Gemma Jerome

My name is Gemma Jerome. I am a planning student from the University of Liverpool. I believe passionately in the potential for students to shape their own student experience. I actively encourage my fellow students to empower themselves through participation, and become their own representatives.

In my two years at Liverpool, I have experienced being a course, departmental, and faculty rep, as well as being a Student Councillor, and am currently a Student Trustee. I am also a key facilitator in the Transition University group at Liverpool, which seeks to create a working partnership between management, academics and students, to envision and deliver a more sustainable university. I am involved in various other projects in the wider community, including setting up a housing co-op and raising awareness of climate change through environmental/ youth projects.

Katy Philips

Hi, I'm Katy Phillips, one of the four elected Presidents of UWESU. As a student I always tried to be involved with the academic side of the Union, but quickly discovered that there was only so far you could go before needing help from those who had some weight with the institution, as well as the right contacts to get the job done, the Students' Union Presidents. As a President this year, I have had the same feeling about issues that affect students on a national level. When it comes to the broader scale of the Higher Education System, you need to work with others nationally, as well as the elected Officers of the NUS, to ensure you are being heard. This is why I put myself forward for the NSF, to work with others to ensure national policy is transparent, relevant and understood by those it affects.

Aaron Porter

I was elected as the Vice-President (Higher Education) for the National Union of Students to serve a second term, which ended in June 2010. In this post, I was responsible for leading representation and campaigns for UK students in higher education. Alongside this role, I have been a Non-Executive Board Director for the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and a Board member for the European Students' Union (ESU). I was also on the Academic Council of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the National Student Survey Steering Group and the Burgess Implementation Steering Group. From July 2010, I have started as President of the National Union of Students (NUS).

Prior to this, I graduated with a BA English from the University of Leicester in 2006, and then spent two years as a sabbatical officer and trustee of the Students' Union. During this time I was the Deputy Chair (Communication) and a Board Member for NUS Services Ltd, the commercial arm of the NUS. I also founded and was elected as the first Chair of Unions94 (the Students' Unions of the 1994 Group of Universities) and chaired the Student Loans Company Student Consultative Group. As a student, I was editor of 'The Ripple' the student newspaper for the University of Leicester.

Christopher Sadler

I am a second year student at Birmingham City University studying Visual Communications with the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design. I am especially interested in design and photography. My interests and hobbies include a range of outdoor activities including walking, kayaking and climbing. I am also an active member of the scouting movement.

Armineh Soorenian

I am a disabled, postgraduate, mature, international student, and have been in UK Higher Education for the last ten years. In this period, I have been interested in and campaigned for various issues relating to disabled, postgraduate and international students. My involvement in organisations such as the National Postgraduate Committee and the British Council has strengthened these efforts. The PhD research that I am conducting at present, investigates disabled international students' experiences. Through this research, I hope to identify barriers faced by disabled international students, and recommend ways to address these difficulties in order to strive towards an inclusive Higher Education system for 'all'. By participating in the National Student Forum, I have endeavoured to contribute towards and promote this inclusive educational structure further, strengthened by my own research findings.

Wes Streeting

From July 2007 – July 2010 I was President of the National Union of Students, an elected position responsible for representing the needs and interests of more than five million students in Further and Higher Education across the UK. Before taking up this position, I was Vice-President and have been a member of the NUS National Executive Committee, with specific responsibility for liaising with the National Union of Teachers. Prior to joining the NUS, I served as President of Cambridge University Students' Union from 2004-5, after graduating with a bachelor's degree in History from Selwyn College in 2004. I was a member of the Burgess Steering Group on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement and a member of the Delivery Partnership Steering Group on admissions. I was also a Director of the Higher Education Academy and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and a board member of the European Students' Union (ESU).

Alina Talipowa

I am currently a Law Masters international student at Bournemouth University. Having come to the UK in September 2008, I tried to be involved in academic and non-academic student life as much as possible in order to get new experience, be heard and shine. As a result, I have already proven myself more than capable academically. I am a Law Masters student representative. This gives me a great chance to represent and, if necessary, to defend students' interests in the meetings with academic and non-academic university staff. It is wonderful to feel that I am the 'voice' from the Law Masters course and can speak in meetings. I also work for Bournemouth University on Postgraduate Open Days, in order to tell prospective students about studying at the university and our social life here. Being a member of the hub, I started to do my volunteering in a local charity bookshop and got more involved in volunteering by applying and looking forward to new opportunities (such as the Refugees' Project in the Red Cross and Befriend Project at AgeConcern). As a result of my proactive life as an international student, I won a prestigious scholarship from the University for outstanding international students and very recently I was awarded the status of Regional Winner (South West) and Finalist of British Council International Students Shine! Awards 2009. I do continue making further steps towards broad opportunities and new aims.

Steven Thomson

I am currently studying at Sheffield Hallam University towards a degree in Biomedical Science. I am 27 years old and I have been a student at Sheffield Hallam University since 2001. My previous study includes a BSc (hons) Sports Development with Coaching and a BSc (hons) Computing Degree Routes.

During my time at university I have taken an active role in university life, including being appointed president of an extremely popular students' union society (2001 – 2003). Other roles I have been appointed to have included: Deputy Chair of the Student Union's governing council (URC) and a Faculty Representative, representing students at the highest level within the university.

As well as my active involvement at university I am also a Football Association referee, officiating semi-professional football in the north of England, up to twice a week. I also enjoy keeping fit, socialising, going to the cinema and other leisure activities.

My two years as a National Student Forum member have been very interesting and I have enjoyed making a positive contribution to this year's NSF Annual Report.

Beth Timney

I am currently a student at Teesside University, working towards a MSc in Occupational Therapy. For the past few years I have been at the University of Nottingham, studying Archaeology as both an undergraduate and a postgraduate student. Following this, I undertook a year as a Sabbatical Officer for the Students' Union. In this role I was responsible for representing the needs and interests of a diverse and growing postgraduate community.

Paul Tobin

Having never even studied Politics before university, I had no idea what university would be like in any way; at the age of 18, the lifestyle, the people and the course would all be completely new.

However, I've loved every minute of my three years as a student and I want to make sure that every student has the opportunity to feel the same. As Sheffield University Students' Union President for 2009-2010, I'm having a fantastic year working with students and trying my best to improve their student experience whilst also bringing any issues, ideas and improvements they suggest to a national level. My particular interests as a Union Officer involve promoting better environmental practices and improving democratic engagement, but in my spare time I enjoy playing basketball, the guitar and learning as much as I can about everything!

Jonathan Tobutt

I have recently started a practice-led PhD at the University of Leeds under the supervision of Drs. Michael Allis and Bryan White and historical performance keyboard specialist, Daniel Gordon. His research subject is early 20th century British Oboe Music; specifically exploring and re-evaluating the impact and influence of the British virtuoso oboist, Leon Goossens (1896-1988) from a contemporary and a historical performance practice perspective.

Following my musical training at the Royal Academy of Music, I gave my debut recital at the Purcell Rooms and worked as a session musician. I retired from playing professionally nearly 30 years ago to pursue a career in the Arts, Education and the Criminal Justice System. I returned to my musical roots in 2007.

Musically, I have extensive experience of orchestral and chamber music and also as a solo performer. Recent recording work has included Edward German's operetta *Tom Jones* for the Naxos Label and the first recording of the Concerto No.2 for Oboe and Orchestra by Gordon Jacob. I play for the National Festival Orchestra and Orchestra D'Amico as well as for other choral and amateur operatic and musical societies throughout the North East and West regions. I established the *Northern Oboe Trio* in 2008, with fellow oboists Sue Edwards and Zoe Glossop.

I am employed on a part-time basis as an examinations manager and Assistant Concerts Manager at the University of Leeds. I am also a member of the Life Long Learning Centre's support scheme at the University, mentoring mature first-time students. In addition to academic study and concert work commitments, my interests include growing oriental lilies and collecting works by the South African artist, Neville Hickman.

The NSF wishes to thank the universities who have shared their practice in this report; the sector organisations and stakeholder representatives, including NUS representatives, who have contributed to discussions; and SHM, who have facilitated and supported the work of the NSF since it began.

Acknowledgements

National Student Forum
Annual Report 10

Electronic copies can be downloaded from www.bis.gov.uk/studentexperience