

Conclusion

Throughout this submission it is clear that there is significant variance between the experiences of different students, which is only to be expected at an institution the size and shape of Birmingham City University. However, it is also clear that there are areas of the student experience across the University that are generally excellent and areas where problems exist.

The Union is pleased to note the generally very high levels of satisfaction with learning and teaching across the University. It is our belief that this is one of the most vital aspects of the student experience and we believe our students can generally expect a very good relationship with staff and a very positive experience of learning and teaching. We would also like to commend the recent initiatives and partnership work detailed in the chapter on 'Quality Enhancement through Partnership', as well as the clear and excellent information currently provided on the website and prospectuses.

In other areas such as 'Facilities' and 'Support', whilst it is clear that there are some concerns regarding satisfaction levels of certain groups of students or very specific areas within these broader topics, the Union is again pleased to be able to comment positively on the generally high levels of student satisfaction.

The areas we have identified as being of more concern - in general, assessment and feedback, organisation and management and student representation and voice - should come as little surprise to the institution, and the Union recognises the efforts of the University, both overall and from particular staff, faculties and departments, to improve student satisfaction in all of these areas. The Union is confident that the recommendations outlined below to try to address some of these areas will not, in general, prove controversial.

Overall, we feel the University has much to be proud of, as well as much potential for improvement. The Union is confident that where satisfaction levels are currently not as high as they could be, current and future efforts and initiatives have the potential to fundamentally address these concerns, and that the student experience at Birmingham City is likely to continue to develop and improve over the coming years in a variety of ways.

Recommendations

The following is the complete list of key recommendations that the Union wishes to make to the University as a result of our findings in this submission. They are separated into Major Recommendations (generally wider issues or areas that the Union believes should be addressed as a priority during 2010-11 and beyond) and Minor Recommendations (issues that the Union believes are less of a priority and that have a lesser impact on the student experience overall). Almost all of these have been included above in the relevant chapter of this document, with the exception of the first Major Recommendation relating to the need for further research into the experiences of students with disabilities.

As these are often based largely on the feedback we have received from our students, the Union recognises that in some cases these may be things the University is already doing, or indeed has already tried to do previously. We aim to work with the University over the coming academic year and beyond to address each of these initial recommendations, to learn more about what is already in place and how we may be able to support it, to develop these recommendations as required based on feedback from both the University and students and to push for further improvements wherever we can.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Union, with the support of the University, should carry out further research into the experiences of disabled students at BCU; this should be disseminated and action points resulting from this research agreed on at the Student Experience Committee.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATION 2:

We recognise and welcome that the University is already aware of the issues surrounding student satisfaction with Organisation and Management, and will no doubt already have ideas on how to tackle this. The Union recommends that this be made a clear priority in 2010-11; that efforts are made to learn from the good practice in some courses and faculties and for this to be shared widely with areas that are doing less well; that students are consulted further about how they wish to receive communications from the University regarding the organisation of their course (which the Union would be pleased to work with the University on) and that staff at all levels of the institution are encouraged to get involved in tackling this problem.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Union is confident that the University is already aware of the issues surrounding student satisfaction with feedback and assessment. However, we recommend that stronger measures need to be taken to ensure that staff are aware of what is reasonable for students to expect from them, in terms of both timing and quality of feedback on assessment. The Union will undertake to carry out further research into students' understanding and expectations of feedback. The Union urges the 20 day turnaround time to be mandated more strongly throughout the University; further, the University should make reference to NUS guides on best practice on feedback, and seek to disseminate and share more widely existing examples of good practice around assessment and feedback and encourage the greater application of existing innovations.

MAJOR RECOMMENDATION 4:

The current review of Boards of Studies should be expanded into a full-scale review of the existing representation structure, led by the Students' Union, that allows for possible radical changes and recognises the different needs of different courses, such that a renewed scheme can be launched in the 11-12 academic

year with considerably higher levels of buy-in from staff and students across all levels. The Union and University should work towards allocating sufficient resources to student representation.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 1:

To ensure that all faculties are sending out similar relevant information to all new students regarding the University as a whole, and to seek to share good practice between faculties regarding the information sent out about courses in advance, including all information sent to international students, and specifically for the Business School to seek to learn what it can do to improve student satisfaction in this area.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 2:

To consider including more information dedicated specifically to part time study and to clarify what is meant by Equivalent Level Qualifications in future versions of the prospectuses/ University guide.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 3:

To examine the procedure for inducting International Students who do not arrive in time for the main induction, and what changes may be possible to improve the experience both for those students who arrive late and the rest of their cohorts; to examine whether there needs to be a stricter cut-off point for when students can join a course that has already commenced.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 4:

To consider expanding current provision of electronic submission of coursework, with a particular view on how this could be beneficial to part time students across the University.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 5:

The Union and University should work together to raise awareness among all students at Birmingham City University of the fact that they are able to request feedback on exams.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 6:

The Faculty of PME, if it hasn't already, should investigate the issues highlighted by students around the issue of practice space, and innovative solutions should be sought incorporating the input of students and potentially looking for facilities outside of the immediate Conservatoire campus if it is felt these would be beneficial to students.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 7:

To look at what can be done to better manage the way the University's libraries are used by students, to focus on ensuring that those who need a place for quiet study are able to access this when they need to. The Union will endeavour to work with library staff to find ways we can support the libraries to address this issue.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 8:

For the University to consider, when reviewing the EC claims system, whether additional provision needs to be made for those students who, with justifiable reason, attempt assessments and then afterwards wish to submit a claim for EC. The aim of any additional provision should be to ensure that vulnerable students are not disadvantaged by too great an emphasis being placed on whether or not they took the assessment rather than the actual circumstances behind their claim.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 9:

The University should look at whether it is possible to better ensure that all papers for committee meetings at both a University and Faculty level are circulated at least a week in advance of the meeting; further to ensure that hard copies of papers for Faculty level committee meetings are made available to Faculty Representatives at least a week in advance of meetings.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 10:

The University should consider whether it can improve communication between the Faculties and staff and students at Franchise Colleges, to address issues of organisation and management including how changes to course content are communicated.

MINOR RECOMMENDATION 11:

The University should look into whether it is possible to provide dedicated learning spaces for BCU students at Franchise Colleges to better facilitate group work where it is included as part of the course, either within existing library facilities or through mature student rooms or the equivalent.