

# Hull University Union's Annual Student Written Submission 2012



STUDENTS' UNION OF THE YEAR 2012

Students' Union  
**Evaluation Initiative**

**Gold** Award 2011

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Published 16<sup>h</sup> September 2012  
Hull University Union (HUU)

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This submission was planned and written by Lee Fallin, Education, Research and Policy Co-ordinator (ERPC) and Victoria Winterton, Vice President Education (VPE) 2011/12. We would also like to thank all of our colleagues for their support in the production of this submission.

Any questions regarding the SWS should be directed to Victoria Winterton: [Victoria.Winterton@hull.ac.uk](mailto:Victoria.Winterton@hull.ac.uk)

## Foreword



The past year has been one of great success for Hull University Union, winning Student Union of the Year at the National Union of Students Awards 2012 was a huge achievement and one that we are all immensely proud of. Along with this prestigious award many others came before including; Community Relations Award (NUS Awards 2012), Innovative Student Engagement Award (NUS Higher Education Awards 2012), Best Bar None Gold Award (NUS Services Convention and AGM 2012) and in partnership with the university the Best Partnership Award (Student Money Advice Awards 2012). All this has left the current sabbatical team well motivated for a fantastic year ahead and ready to maintain this high standard.

This is especially the case for the Education Zone at HUU, we now have an extra member of staff in Steve Ralph our new Course Representation Co-ordinator who will oversee the entire course representation system to enable us to become faster at identifying issues so we can be quicker to act on them, ever

increasing the value of the student experience. This academic year is set to be an extremely challenging one, with the first intake of students paying those dreaded nine thousand pound fees. As always the quality of academic provision students receive is one of our fundamental themes and this Student Written Submission shows our commitment to supporting the education of our members. Never afraid to push the limits and try something new, this year's submission offers radical recommendations and fresh ideas to ensure the enhancement of education at the University of Hull. We are very excited to work together to tackle the challenges and achieve the goals outlined by this submission.

There are some things that are difficult to evidence and that lies in the passion I feel for Education and for the University of Hull. I could not have been happier to have been elected Vice-President for Education in March 2012, and given the opportunity to work for a Students' Union and a university that has given me an incredible three years and a fantastic student experience. My passion and that of many others can be put down to the hard work and enthusiasm of Lee Fallin, our Education and Representation Co-ordinator. Lee will be leaving HUU this year to join the Library and Learning Innovation team and we wish to thank him for all his incredible, hard work over the past two years. Lee has been fundamental to our success with his incredible work ethic, his innovative ideas and his inspiring personality.

I look forward to the year ahead with enthusiasm and excitement for an even better university and an even better students' union.

Thank you

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victoria Winterton', with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Victoria Winterton

Vice-President (Education)

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# CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

As part of our commitment to enhancing our members' student experience and education, Hull University Union (HUU), has pledged to produce an annual written submission. These submissions stand as summary of the issues students have experienced across a whole range of services, resources and means of academic support, as well as departmental issues, teaching quality and feedback. This document stands as our third annual submission and as with previous years we hope the University will continue to work with us to address the key issues arising from this report. Improving the student experience forms a fundamental part of HUU's work and this has never been more pressing than during this period of rising tuition fees and student expectations. The document includes a number of recommendations as well as a prioritised action plan at the rear of the document.

## Research Methodology

Broad research bases were used to identify key issues and then more focused studies were conducted on those areas. This approach ensures that the report is founded on research made on real problem areas rather than in areas where we assume there are problems. This document has been produced using extensive qualitative and quantitative data. All primary quantitative data has been inputted and analysed using SPSS Statistics and/or Microsoft Office Excel. Qualitative data has been coded and analysed using a mixture of Nvivo and traditional methods.

**Unless otherwise specified, all graphs within this submission are from the Education Survey 2012**

### 1. Academic Council minutes

Academic Council is a forum for Course Representatives to discuss academic issues. Over the academic year four Academic Councils took place on both Campuses.

### 2. Direct student comments, emails, issues and eBridge discussions.

HUU staff deal with education issues of students on a daily basis. These staff members used their extensive experience to contribute to this document.

### 3. Education Survey

The Education Survey was completed by a total of 1108 respondents across both campuses.

### 4. End of Year Staff-Student Committee (SSC) reports and minutes

All departmental SSCs are required to produce an End of Year Report summarizing the issues they have dealt with over the year.

### 5. Interim Course Rep surveys

HUU conducted several interim and targeted surveys with Course Representatives over the last academic year.

### 6. Library Campaign - Scarborough

HUU worked with Scarborough campus staff to review the new library development, producing 10 prioritised recommendations for the review.

### 7. Student participation across University committees, projects and working groups

HUU has helped match Sabbatical Officers and students to provide student input and representation across a number of committees, projects and working groups.

### 8. Training for Course Representatives

An integral part of training involves building on the experiences the Course Reps have from being a student, leading to a sizable amount of data on student issues.

### 9. Other Secondary sources

- National Union of Students (NUS) papers, reports and conferences
- NUS Workers in Democracy and Representation (WIDAR) meetings
- National Students Survey (NSS)
- UoH committee meetings, conferences, working groups, publications and Codes of Practice

- Academic, governmental and research sources

## CHAPTER 2: Learning and Teaching

This chapter will focus on learning and teaching issues that students have experienced.

Key themes to this chapter are: **teaching quality**, **'organisation'**, **communication** and **quality of feedback**.

### Assessment, Submission and Feedback

#### Assessment

This section will concentrate on data HUU has collected regarding formal assessments. As part of our research, one issue has once again emerged regarding the spacing of assignment deadlines and the communication regarding them. This is a key issue for students and was raised in last year's Student Written Submission<sup>1</sup>. Both HUU's Education Survey and NSS have shown this is a continuing problem for students and HUU believes it is something that needs to be monitored. Deadline stress has a potential to impact upon retention, with students often referring to this as a reason they considered dropping out.

*[Considering dropping out because of]: Not managing the work load... when all the deadlines are made to be at the same time*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*



Situations like this are partly down to time management of individual students, but it is clear they need further support in managing their workload. Departments or other central services at the institution need to help support students with time management as part of their induction. Where possible, deadlines should be equally spaced across the semester and when students come into difficulty, departments should offer support to students.

*My health circumstances changed, the department was really lenient and offered to extend my deadlines...then at the last minute decided to change their mind and I'm being pushed to hand in my dissertation to graduate this year- in my circumstances this is too much for me. It's unacceptable!*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

#### Recommendation:

[ST] Students should be support with their workload management as part of the induction process. Additional workshops should be held for those who need more support.  
[ST] Where possible assessment deadlines must be further spaced out and questions should be provided at the start of semester to enable students to start work early.

#### Submission

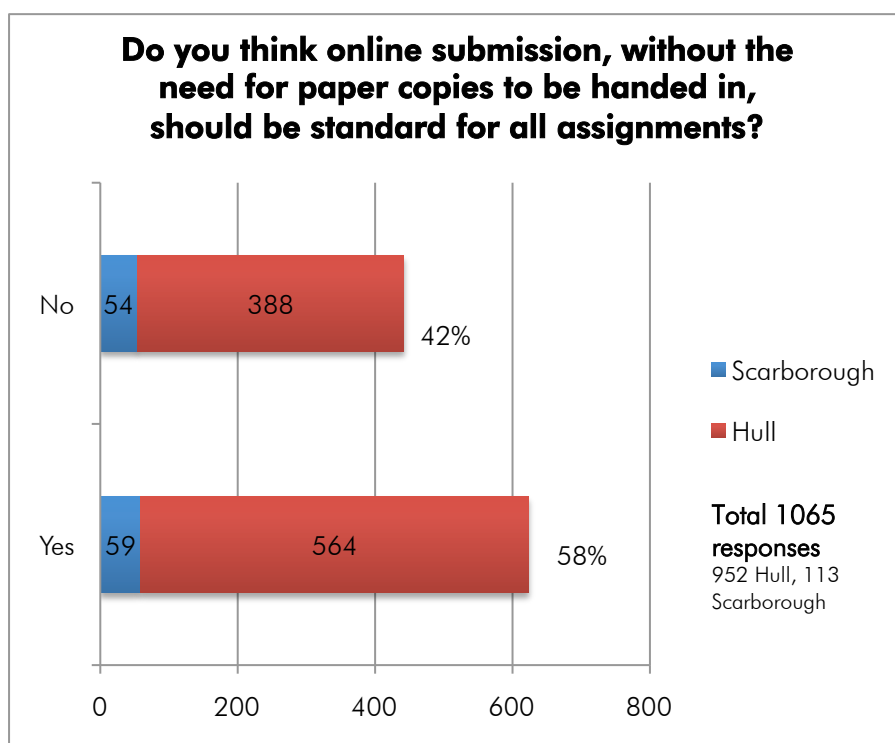
Last year HUU campaigned for a universal policy for late submissions and over length assessments which formed one of the major recommendations of last year's Student Written Submission<sup>2</sup>. HUU is happy to have worked with the University over the last twelve months to make this new policy a reality. This universal policy for submission penalties will bring equity to all students studying at the University and follows consultation with 100's of

<sup>1</sup> HUU, Students' Written Submission, 2011, Hull University Union.

<sup>2</sup> HUU, Students' Written Submission, 2011, Hull University Union.

students<sup>34</sup>. The consultation showed that students wanted a fair policy that allowed some flexibility but was not too lenient. HUU believes the policy that has been developed is fair and equitable and we will be monitoring its application over the coming year.

Online submission for assignments is potentially more eco-friendly and cost effective for students. The printing costs for assignments quickly add up over the course of a degree programme and HUU believes online submission will save students substantial amounts of money over their programme. Despite this, student favour of online submission is not strong enough to justify campus-wide implementation. HUU believes this is due to the current turnitin system which the Education Survey 2012 showed us students find “tedious”<sup>5</sup>. The data indicates this is due to the lack of proper instruction on how to use it as well as the need to submit both online and in paper which proof of submission.



**Recommendation:** [ST] The University should further research online submission and try to improve the current implementation of turnitin.

## Feedback

While the University has established new standards for assessment feedback to ensure it is timely and legible, there are still issues with some departments that are not meeting this benchmark. It is clear that more work needs to be done to provide qualitative guidance to academics on what good feedback looks like. More needs to be done to ensure all departments are maintaining feedback principles in line with the code of practice and Course Representatives should focus on this over the next academic year. Improvements in this area have a potential to improve the student experience at the University and positively impact upon league tables. To achieve this however, major pockets of poor practice need to be tackled.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

<sup>3</sup> HUU, Academic Council – Hull 2/2/2012, 2012, Hull University Union.

<sup>4</sup> HUU, Academic Council – Scarborough 14/2/2012, 2012, Hull University Union.

<sup>5</sup> HUU, Education Survey, 2012, Hull University Union.

*It takes far too long to receive essay feedback. We have to stick to deadlines and get a 10% deduction if our work is even a minute late, yet this year I have waited up to 2 and a half months for assignment feedback.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

It would be unfair to label all departments under these comments but there is still a long way to go. There are areas of excellent practice within the institution and the University needs to better collate and share this.

*A lot of friendly and approachable lecturers that nearly all are accessible and have open door policies (can chat anytime they are in office). They provide a variety of feedback sessions to collect assignments and ask the module leader for additional feedback if required.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

The benefit of good quality feedback like that described above cannot be underestimated. Research from the NUS and QAA<sup>6</sup> has shown once again there is a disconnection between what institutions are providing and what students are expecting. This data shows students are requesting more discussion based feedback as opposed to static written feedback. This involves individualised meetings with tutors for feedback which the research showed over 65% of students wanted in addition to written comments and online comments that came out at 79% and 47% respectively. While this research is nationally based across a number of institutions from all mission groups, there are definitely uses to applying this to a local scale. Nationally, the lowest scoring areas of the NSS are all historically to do with feedback and this is an area the sector needs to desperately improve.

Unfortunately, this level of personal feedback is difficult to manage in some departments where there is a less than favourable staff (engaged with teaching) to student ratio. The University however needs to address this issue. While some areas argue students do not always seek or benefit from feedback, HUU is campaigning to ensure students realise the benefits of feedback, collect it and demand more input. Over the year HUU will be working with departments to ensure our feedback charter is communicated to all students and that they realise the value of engaging with feedback.

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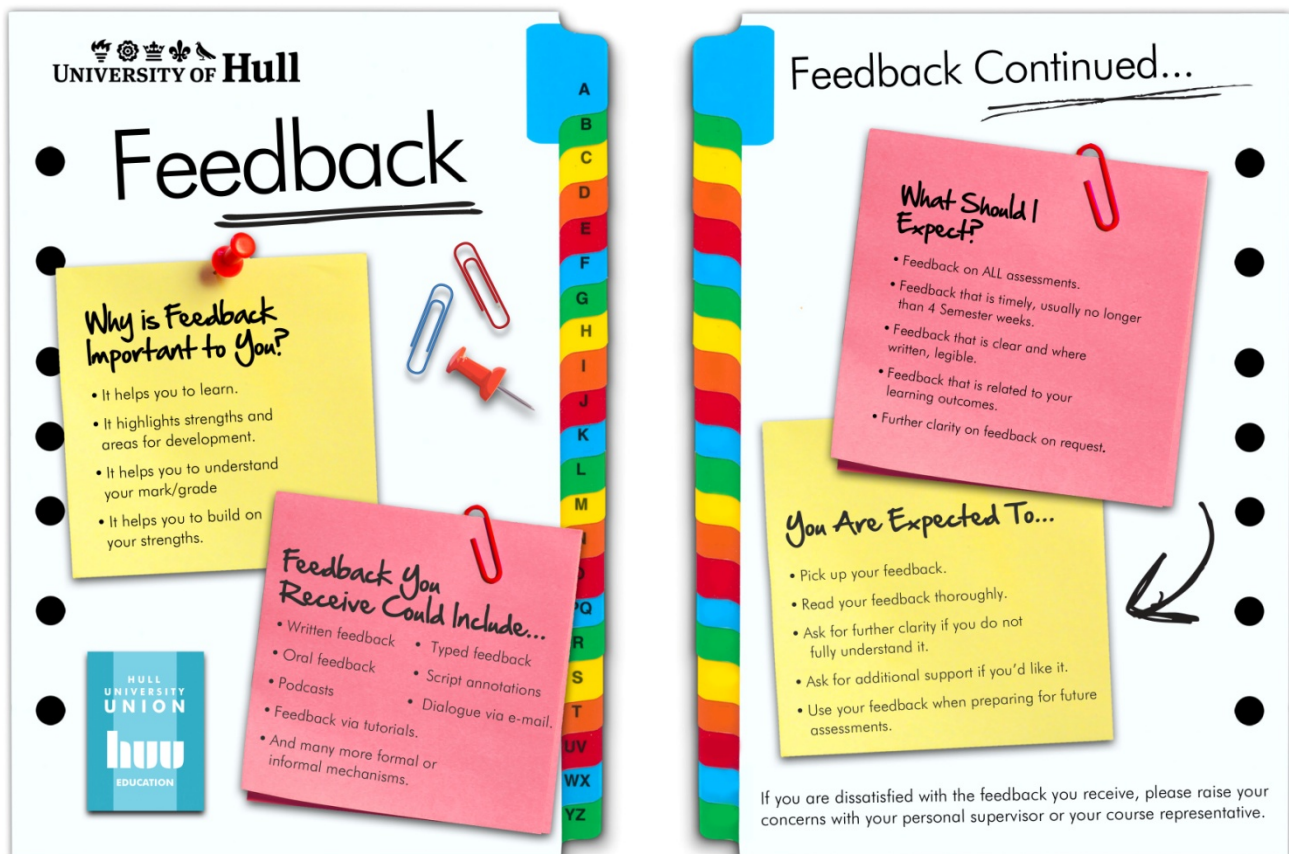
<sup>6</sup> NUS & QAA, Student Experience Research 2012 – Part 1 Teaching, 2011, National Union of Students/Quality Assurance Agency.



# Top Performers

	Feedback on my work has been prompt.	I have received detailed comments on my work.	Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand	Average
Combined Languages	90	92	90	90.67
Film Studies & Media Culture Society	85	92	85	87.33
Music	84	88	84	85.33
American Studies	73	93	80	82.00
History	81	78	77	78.67

This University needs to ensure all students receive equitable opportunity to receive quality feedback. The current range of feedback quality breeds inequity across the University and as students at this institution are all paying the same free rate they all deserve an appropriate and equitable level of feedback for their assessments no matter what they are studying. Sadly, both our research and NSS benchmarks show this is clearly not the case. Looking at the NSS scores for 2012, there are significant differences in the provision of feedback.



Centre for Lifelong Learning	74	79	74	75.67
English	63	87	77	75.67
Sport Health and Exercise Science	69	74	72	71.67
Social Policy	69	74	72	71.67
Geography	65	81	68	71.33

	Feedback on my work has been prompt.	I have received detailed comments on my work.	Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand	Average
Economics	61	66	59	62.00
Psychology	71	59	52	60.67
Marketing and Business Strategy	60	67	53	60.00
BMS	56	63	56	58.33
Biological Sciences	46	54	66	55.33
Law	62	43	47	50.67

Improvement  
needed

Despite the range of scores, it is promising that overall satisfaction scores for assessment and feedback have climbed 3% across the University. This momentum however needs to be maintained in order to ensure a fair and consistent student experience. Further guidelines and standards need to be developed to ensure appropriate levels of feedback are given to all students.

Finally, in relation to feedback, HUU believes more formative feedback should be provided to students to enable them to further engage with assignments and improve before assessment takes place. When looking at formative feedback, seven principles of good feedback have been established and these should be championed within departments:<sup>7</sup>

1. helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);
2. facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning;
3. delivers high quality information to students about their learning;
4. encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
5. encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
6. provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
7. provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching

<sup>7</sup> David NICOL and Debra MACFARLANE-DICK, "Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice," *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol 31(2), 2006, pp199-218.

**Recommendation:** [ST] As part of the NSS action plan process that feeds into ULTAC, departments should be graded red, amber or green on their NSS feedback scores. Red departments must seek to improve their scores or face a penalty from the PVC L&T if they fail to do so.  
[ST] The University must work to ensure all departments are adhering to the feedback charter.  
[ST] HUU should work with all departments to ensure they are displaying the feedback charter.

## Contact Hours and Departmental Support

### Contact Hours

Comments regarding contact hours featured heavily in both HUU and NSS data this year. While contact hours vary significantly due to the nature of the discipline and the teaching methods, there are a lot of students who feel they are not adequately supported with teaching contact time. Furthermore, HUU believes contact hours will be an important comparator on Key Information Set (KIS) data. How Hull compares with the rest of the sector will be important to prospective students – and this may be an issue, especially where current students feel they are not supported with enough contact time.



In our Education Survey, HUU asked students to give us their average contact hours. The sample average calculated to 10.25 hours a week with 1030 people responding. The question was asked openly and then later coded to an average value. Students were invited to comment on their contact hours and the vast majority of them did not find the hours suitable. Several comments suggest value for money is a key issue for students.

*For the amount students pay to go to university, no* (Education Survey, 2012)

*No. I think it's disgusting that I pay so much money for so little contact time.* (Education Survey, 2012)

Contact hours naturally vary as students progress through stages. While it has to be acknowledged that with HE level study there is a lot of self-directed learning, some students feel that the drop in contact hours over the later years is damaging to their motivation. In many cases there is a strong argument for further student support in the third (and fourth) year. This could be supported with alternative forms of contact and support but as a minimum, students need to be better supported to manage their workload.

*As a third year I can understand why we have so few contact hours a week, to concentrate on independent study, however I have found myself struggling to get motivated and also haven't realised how much work I should have been doing, so perhaps more meetings with supervisors to keep track of progress would be beneficial, saving you from the last minute panic that you won't be able to finish your work in time.* (Education Survey, 2012)

*...although we are aware that a lot of our study should be self study, I feel that more contact with staff and a larger time in lectures would be more motivating.* (Education Survey, 2012)

HUU has found that a lot of students may be more concerned over the type and quality of contact time with staff than they are over the quantity of such time. A lot of students asked for more tutorial, small group and personal sessions with lecturers to get an enhanced level of support.

*More time to go see lecturers to discuss problems would be more helpful, more revision sessions would be extremely useful when leading up to exams.* (Education Survey, 2012)

*Would prefer more small sessions (tutorials etc.)* (Education Survey, 2012)

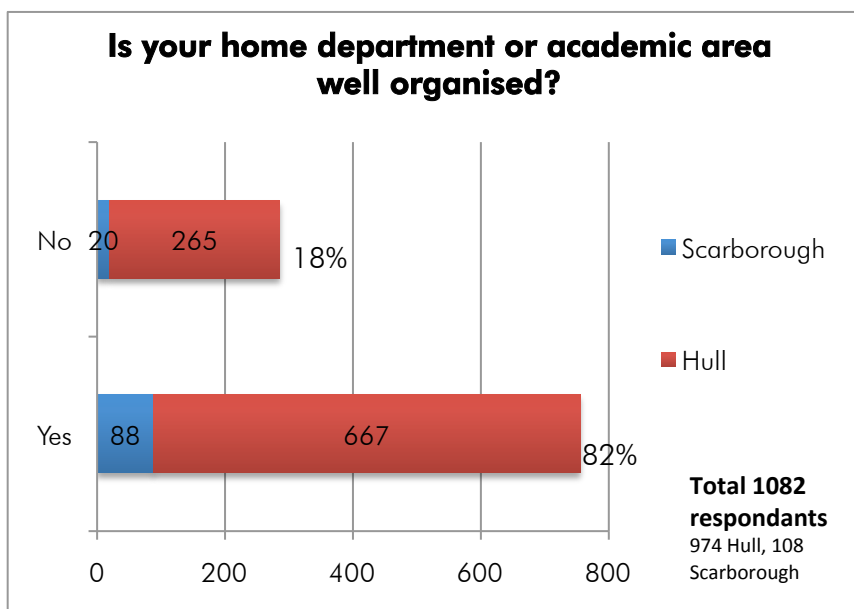
Finally, when considering contact hours the opportunity to attend drop-ins, office hours or contact staff outside of timetabled sessions has to be acknowledged. In these cases, it is always valuable when office hours are accessible and tutors are happy to provide additional support.

*There is always a chance for me to see any member of staff as most of them open their office twice a week.* (Education Survey, 2012)

**Recommendation:** [ST] Review all contact hours to ensure we are in line with other institutions on the publication of the Key Information Sets (KIS). For cases where the contact hours at Hull significantly differ consideration should be given to increasing formal contact hours.  
[ST] Where student comments in the NSS indicate academic areas are failing to provide sufficient contact hours then action plans must be drawn up to tackle this.  
[ST] Further support should be provided to third and fourth year students with formalised support hours with either dissertation supervisors and/or lecturers.  
[ST] Find a coherent way of communicating the contact opportunities students have, such as office hours that may form part of their overall contact hours.

## Departmental Support

While contact hours with academic staff are key drivers in student satisfaction, departments offer a multitude of other support mechanisms to students. While this involves personal supervision which is covered later in this submission, a great deal of front-line support is provided within departmental offices. This support includes timetable provision, essay submission and general enquiries. Organisation is an important part of this and when asked, "Is your home department or academic area well organised?" 82% of students answered favourably. This does mean however, that 18% of students (almost a fifth) do not believe their department is organised. Qualitative data shows that problems constantly arise when different areas of a department are communicating different messages. These issues are particularly associated with students studying joint and with degree programmes, however unified submission penalties will assist somewhat with this.



*[English] It often seems as though the office don't know what they are doing.* (Education Survey, 2012)

*[Humanities] For joint degree students departments do not liaise well with one another - clashes with modules offered, different requirements for referencing and essay submissions. They send lots of emails that are not relevant - i.e. sending messages to different years to everyone. Their office hours are ineffective sometimes - not opening until after classes makes it difficult to report absences/ ring with queries prior to classes starting. The hour and a half lunch break is also particularly frustrating when a simple, quick question needs to be asked.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

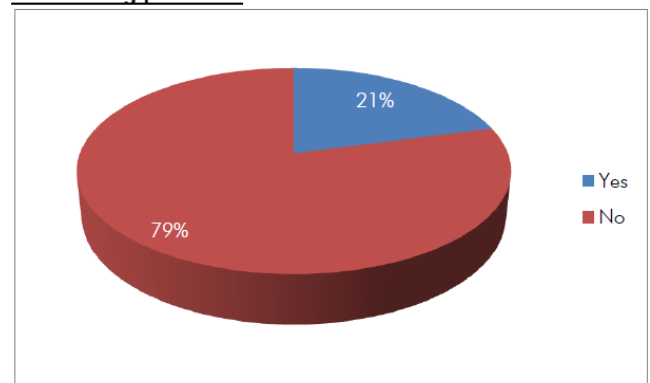
*[Politics] The organisation of the politics office can approach shambolic with supervisors being given the wrong dissertations to mark and taking several weeks to process them and still getting it wrong.*

*[SSE] What one lecturer says, is completely different to another. Things are always being changed, and a lot of what we hear is through word of mouth until we get a direct answer from the lecturers. It's so unorganised its shocking.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

There are situations where issues, affecting organisation are outside of a department's control. One prime example of this is central timetabling. Unfortunately as departments are issuing timetables to students, departments will be seen as at fault when timetables are late.

**Timetabling problems**



*Don't give out timetables within a reasonable time - for example this year I wanted to do an extra-curricular course, which started in Week 1 of the first Semester, but the course had already started before I had even got my timetable, where I discovered I would be available to take the course, had I known timings earlier! They also do not have long opening hours.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

Clearly, the inefficiencies in timetabling are having a significant impact on students' perceptions of the institution and their department. In the HUU Rate Your Union Survey (RYU)<sup>8</sup> 21% of students surveyed had experienced issues with their timetabling. Comments relating to this question discussed timetable clashes and delays. The late release of timetables is a concern for HUU as it affects the ability of students to be involved in co-curricular, extra-curricular, work experience and part-time work opportunities.

**Recommendation:** [ST] Some departments need to review their internal communication procedures to ensure all staff are adequately informed to best support students. Communication is not currently consistent and that raises serious issues for students.

<sup>8</sup> HUU, Rate Your Union Survey, 2011, Hull University Union.

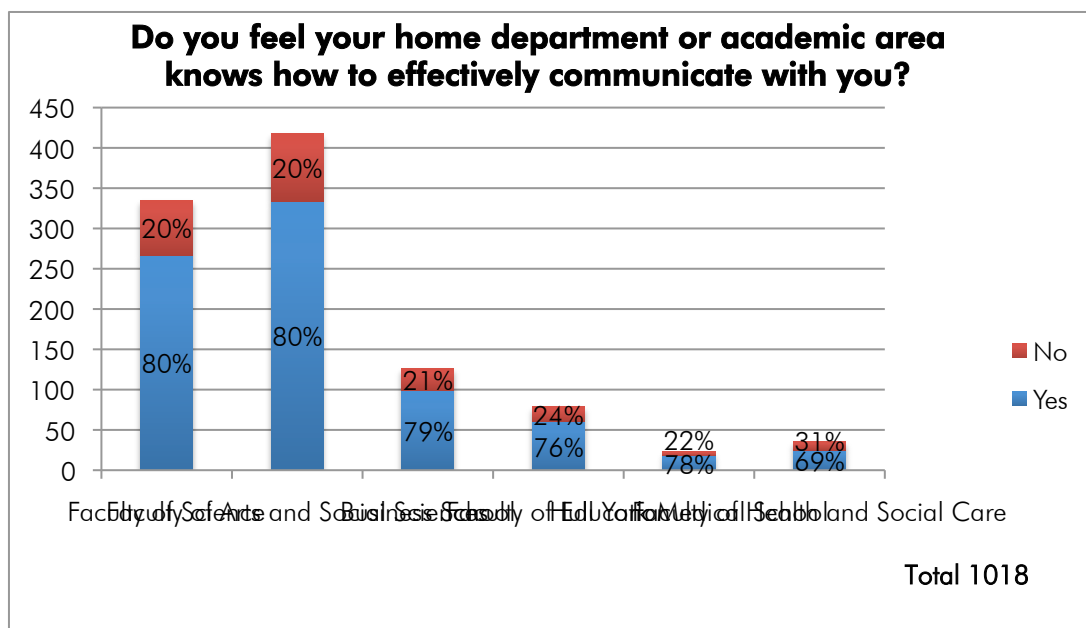


[ST] The University needs to establish a working group to outline short-term and long-term goals with timetabling based on the recently published report. As a minimum timetables must be realised three weeks before term starts.

[ST] Mechanisms need to be introduced to counteract the serious communication issues between joint/with programmes, the departments involved and their students.

## Communication

When asking students why they believe their departments are not organised, several issues reoccur across all departments. The vast majority of comments link directly to departmental communication and this is definitely reflected within answers to the question "Do you feel your home department or academic area knows how to effectively communication with you?".



Ratings are fairly spread across all faculties with over 20% of students surveyed in each believing their home department or academic area does not know how to effectively communicate with them. There are however some excellent examples of good practice occurring where students rated favourably.

[CES] They have a texting service where they text us if a lecture has been cancelled. They also have a very good email service which they use a lot to inform us of information regarding submission of work etc.

(Education Survey, 2012)

[HUBS] Majority of staff send email and reply in a good time frame and office hours are posted on their office doors.

(Education Survey, 2012)

[Science] Sharepoint and e-mail mostly, but the in-lecture communication from teaching staff is also good.

(Education Survey, 2012)

[History] I receive regular emails and updates. Ebridge is kept up to date by most tutors and any matter they might feel needs reiteration will be sent via post as well. I have also recieved phone calls where necessary.

(Education Survey, 2012)

This page highlights areas for improvement in departmental communication represented by comments from the Education Survey 2012.

### Lack of consistent approach to communication:

There is no unified department announcement board, leaving a variety of disparate communication channels, each of which must be tediously checked.

### Not informing students on lecture changes/cancellations:

...there have been instances in the French department where there has been a cancelled lecture or room change and I haven't been notified.

*There are constant changes in areas such as the date of multi-choice exams which aren't posted in obvious places giving rise to less time available to effectively plan revision prior to the exam.*

**Not taking advantage of social networking for communication:**

*[Politics] They need to become more up to date and use mediums such as text messaging and twitter to communicate things such as cancelled lectures etc.*

**Lack of targeted communication:**

*Random emails sent to everyone on a list is not an effective medium*

*We also get blanket e-mails about tutors office hours changing (tutors that I have nothing to do with) meaning that important e-mails often get lost amongst these.*

**Not posting information online:**

*Sometimes, important information is only posted on the notice board and not sent via email.*

**Lack of personal interaction within department**

*Due to such low contact time within the department I don't feel that if I had a problem there's someone who knows me in any way other than just a name written down on paper who could effectively help me with it.*

**Accuracy of information:**

*HYMS are good at giving out information. The problem comes with the information being correct - which 2/3rds of the time it is not! More communication and training between staff at all management levels needs to occur to improve the quality and correctness of information given to students.*

**Poor communication between academics and office staff:**

*I think that a lot of essential information isn't readily available, there seems to be a lot of passing back and forth between offices and professors.*

**Poor and inconsistent use of eBridge:**

*They don't use eBridge in a consistent manner. Messages aren't always sent in the same way and resources aren't uploaded in a uniform manner across modules. The student representatives are put in place by the department and our request for a variety of teaching styles has been repeatedly rejected. Very few emails telling what's happening. It wouldn't be that hard to update everyone's ebridge calendar to say when lectures and deadlines are. Loads of other Universities do it!! Also stopped informing when deadlines are missed*

*Nobody hardly ever has a clue what is going on. Lecturers don't help by just not bothering to let people know, or by putting an announcement in a corner of ebridge but not sending it so it gets sent to everyone as a notification. Organisation and communication within the whole institution is abysmal*

**The lengths of time for enquiries take to be dealt with:**

*It does sometimes take a fairly long time before any e-mails are answered.*

**Recommendation:**

[ST] The University still needs to develop a unified and institution wide communication strategy. This strategy should provide guidance to departments on how to communicate with students and should govern the use of email, eBridge, social media, intranets, websites, SMS, notice boards, posters, announcements in lectures, personal supervisors and postal mail. With clearly defined institution wide guidelines, students can be reassured where to seek information no matter what department, programme or module it involved. Currently some departments are not engaging with SMS or social media as no guidelines are in place and this is damaging the use of these potential communication mediums.

Communication has been a reoccurring theme for three years and HUU now considers this matter urgent!<sup>9</sup>

### **Departmental Offices' opening times and service**

The quality of support within departmental offices is often a topic of discussion for students, often with praise to departmental administrators and secretaries. This was clearly demonstrated in the quality of nominations support staff serving in departmental offices received for our first annual HUU Student-led Teaching Awards. However, there are still a minority of cases where students are not at all happy with office staff support and this often relates to the aforementioned issues with how 'organised' students perceive a department to be and how well a department communicates with them. There are however a minority of cases where the professionalism of staff is raised suggesting that some staff are offensive, upsetting and unhelpful to students. These are not acceptable aptitudes for front-line staff and while HR issues are difficult to deal with they need to be tackled.

*Also via email the office has failed me several times In getting back to me on matters that are fairly important such as deadlines and examinations, and when they do there is an air of hostility or as If to say 'why are you asking me this?' which has left be with little faith In contacting the department or at least a specific member of the department.*

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

As stated in last year's Student Written Submission<sup>10</sup>, these issues are being monitored by HUU. While there have been fewer incidents this year, departments need recognise the impact these incidents can have on students.

Another cause for student concern are departmental office opening times. While between 66% and 80% of students felt their departmental office opening hours were sufficient, there is still room for improvement. While this means the majority of students are satisfied with these opening times there are serious issues occurring for students who cannot readily access campus such as those who are part-time, work and/or have dependants. In addition all students are constantly experiencing problems with opening hours around assessment time with an increase of complains in this area. These issues have been heavily reflected within the comments of the Education Survey 2012.

*HUU had to deal with an issue where a department had closed their office for an afternoon without informing students. This was the last week of term when students were trying to hand their assignments in before the Christmas break. One student approached HUU in tears as she tried to hand in her assignment before taking her pre-booked train home. HUU managed to get in contact with the department and get someone to stay and take receipt of the essay.*

*(HUU Case Study 2011)*

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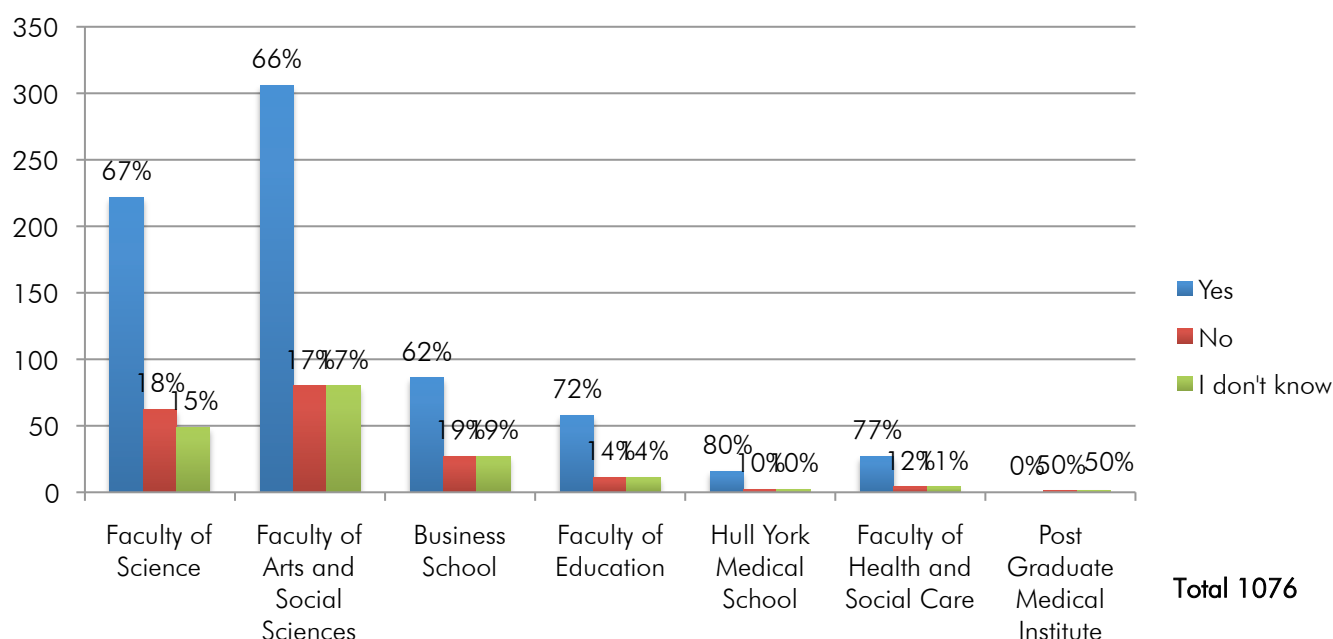
<sup>9</sup> HUU Student Written Submission, 2011, Hull University Union.

HUU Student Written Submission – Collaborative provision, 2010, Hull University Union.

HUU Student Written Submission, 2010, Hull University Union.

<sup>10</sup> HUU Student Written Submission, 2011, Hull University Union.

### Are your home department or academic areas office hours sufficient?



The largest complaint students have regarding departmental office hours regards closure over lunch which is when the majority of students are on campus. This is a big problem for students as it means they cannot access their departmental office when they are available. While closure time is used for staff to catch-up with work as well as taking a break for lunch, it gives students the impression that office staff have a two to three hour lunch break which is not a positive perception. While this is a complex issue to look at due to staff contracts, this needs to be considered moving forward, particularly for larger offices where there is capacity for staged lunch breaks.

*The 2 hour lunch break during the time when the highest proportion of students are on campus is also obscene considering the number of office staff.* (Education Survey, 2012)

*That the departmental office closes for an hour during the day. This can be frustrating when contact is required urgently. Lunch breaks should be given in shifts.* (Education Survey, 2012)

There is also a larger issue with offices that stipulate short, designated hours. This need to be reconsidered as it severely impacts a students' ability to access their departmental office.

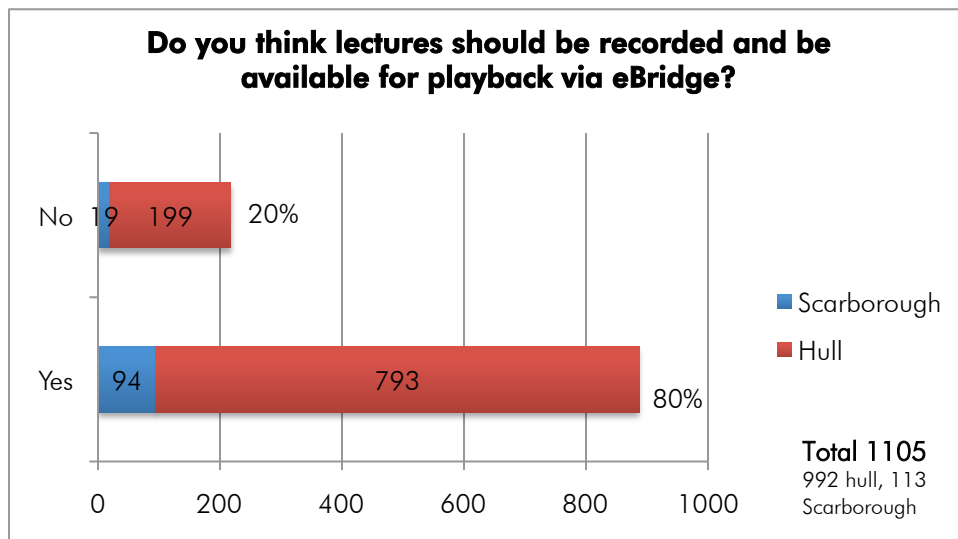
HUU spoke to a student who had a lecture 2-4pm every Thursday. On Thursdays, their departmental office is only open to undergraduate students 2-4pm which theoretically means there is absolutely no availability for this student to access their office on that day. (HUU Case Study, 2011)

**Recommendation:**

- [ST] HUU should continue to recognise excellent departmental office and support staff through our Student-led Teaching Awards. Staff who excel at their positions and contribute to the student experience deserve rewarding.
- [ST] The University still needs to develop the quality of service within departmental offices. Offices should be 'mystery shopped' and students surveyed to ensure they are maintaining high levels of service.
- [ST] The University needs to provide students an accessible route to complain about poor service in departmental offices.
- [ST] Departmental offices should never have such limited opening times that they clash with lectures making them inaccessible. Where possible, hours should be extended and in larger offices staff should stagger lunch.

## Teaching Technology

HUU is very keen to support quality enhancement and teaching development through the use of innovative technologies. This year, HUU has worked with students to research their opinions of electronic recording and playback of lectures. In our survey, over 1105 students responded, with 80% of them in favour of electronic recording and playback. While there are naturally concerns to be addressed over how this may affect attendance rates and student engagement, recording would be a huge advantage for students who cannot make it onto campus for health or other reasons.



### Recommendation:

[ST] HUU believes the University should research this further and trial electronic recording and playback in one department to monitor both attendance and attainment.

## Peer Review

HUU research over the last three years has shown student demand for a more transparent and effective peer review system. The current system is designed to aid staff in their personal and professional development, but does little to actually support staff that are really struggling with their teaching. Currently peer review is done by colleagues within the same department, making it really difficult to raise issues over teaching concerns due to the nature of it being with a colleague. This potentially puts staff into an awkward situation.

While HUU has years of research demonstrating issues with the current system there is little evidence working towards a solution. Nevertheless, HUU strongly believes peer review should be done by colleagues outside of the same department and perhaps within an alternative Faculty. HUU believes this will allow staff to have support and observation from a fellow academic who isn't observing a lecture within their own area of expertise. This will be much more akin to the experience of students in the lecture who are by no means experts and may allow good practice to transcend across the institution by getting departments engaged with each other in teaching practice debate. In addition HUU believes that the University should investigate the use of students in peer review. This will allow the academic observing to get the opinion of a student from within the same faculty. While this is still only theory, HUU believes these two innovations will allow us to further engage students as partners in their learning by involving them in personal and professional development of staff. This will unleash the potential of peer review to work across both the aspects of quality assurance and quality enhancement.

### Recommendation:

[ST] HUU believes there should be a full review of the peer review system. This review should involve students and academics from across the institution to look at how we can enhance teaching and support staff in this remit.



## Student-led Teaching Awards

HUU received University and National Union of Students (NUS)/Higher Education Academy (HEA) funding to run out Student-led Teaching Awards (SLTA) pilot. The primary aim of the SLTA scheme is to raise the profile of learning and teaching within the institution by putting the spotlight firmly onto lecturers who are excellent teachers. Unfortunately teaching often gets overlooked compared to research as research can be monitored through publication, citation and funding whereas teaching is harder to measure. In addition SLTAs enable students to recognise, share and disseminate good teaching practice as well as rewarding and recognising the staff who truly make a difference. This was very important for HUU as our research had shown that students desired a way to recognise excellent staff.

From the very start of the pilot, HUU ensured the scheme was student-led. The title, theme and criteria for each reward was developed by elected volunteers from the Education Zone, which includes student representatives from each faculty, two Course Representatives, the Chair of the Mature Students Committee, the Chair of the Part-time Students Committee and the Chair of the Postgraduates Committee. This was supported by some academics from within the University who helped further enhance the criteria. A form was designed to assist students in nominating their lecturers and the reverse of the form described the criteria to help students write their submissions. The Education Zone also helped with the promotion of the awards nomination process that was open from December 2011 to April 2012. A total of 583 nomination forms were handed in from students. This has provided HUU with a wealth of qualitative knowledge as to what students constitute inspiring and innovative teaching.

Through the SLTAs HUU recognised 28 staff members who were shortlisted for one of the eight award categories. Their good practices were shared throughout the evening with the use of a publication. HUU was also happy to declare the eight winners who are listed below:

1. **Best Module Award** – Social and Developmental Psychology
2. **Best Feedback Award** – Dr James Zborowski
3. **Best Supervisor Award** – Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira
4. **Innovative Teaching Award** – Peter Andrews
5. **Postgraduates' Choice Award** – Professor Chris Bovis
6. **Admin/Support Staff Award** – Chris Kirman
7. **Inspiring Teaching Award** – Rob Miles
8. **Overall Outstanding Achievement Award** – Sumona Mukhuty (accepted by David Tucker on her behalf)



Research has shown that half of students (54.7%) regard an inspirational lecturer as a motivator to do well in their studies<sup>11</sup>. HUU sees the SLTAs as a good way to collect this good practice from a student perspective and it is hoped the University will work with us to disseminate it.

All the qualitative data from nomination forms was analysed to draw out key themes. While a lot of these themes were personal qualities, students were also able to highlight good practices in learning and teaching. Students also demonstrated an appreciation of their lecturer's experience, both academically and in industry.

#### Key personal qualities

*No other lecturer I have can feel the same kind of **passion** [about the discipline]*

*He is **enthusiastic** at all times and has a genuine interest in all the students in his call*

*My first year module \_\_\_\_\_ is delivered in an interesting and **humorous way***

*Her **friendly nature and smiley persona** makes her most eligible [to win this award] (SLTA Nomination, 2012)*

#### Good pedagogical practices

*She **respects learners of all abilities**, adapting her teaching to help us all.*

***Extra material** to really help students gain a deeper understanding of their subject*

*She **always helps students who asks for it**, if she doesn't have time she finds it.*

*She has a great deal of contacts with local employers in geography related **careers** which has helped many students **gain work experience** and **progress with their careers**.*

*She **encourages** students to participate in the lectures, and always makes it a **pleasant environment** to be in. (SLTA Nomination, 2012)*

#### Appreciation of experience

*She also takes **real examples** from her own career to make us understand more easily*

***Incredibly knowledgeable** with a **vast amount of experience***

*[...] Previous experience with Microsoft as a software developer teaches us about **programming in the outside world***

*He often applies subjects studies **to his own academic experiences** (SLTA Nomination, 2012)*

**Recommendation:** HUU is happy to announce we will be running Student-led Teaching Awards again. We will be opening nominations for this year's awards later in the session. We hope for the University's continued support with these awards and we look forward to celebrating another year of teaching excellence. We would recommend that the University works with us to help disseminate the good practice for this year's SLTA and any awards in the future. A stand in the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference as well as publications, seminars and workshops should also be considered.

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<sup>11</sup> NUS & QAA (2012): Student Experience Research 2012 – Part 1 Teaching

## Peer Assisted Study Sessions

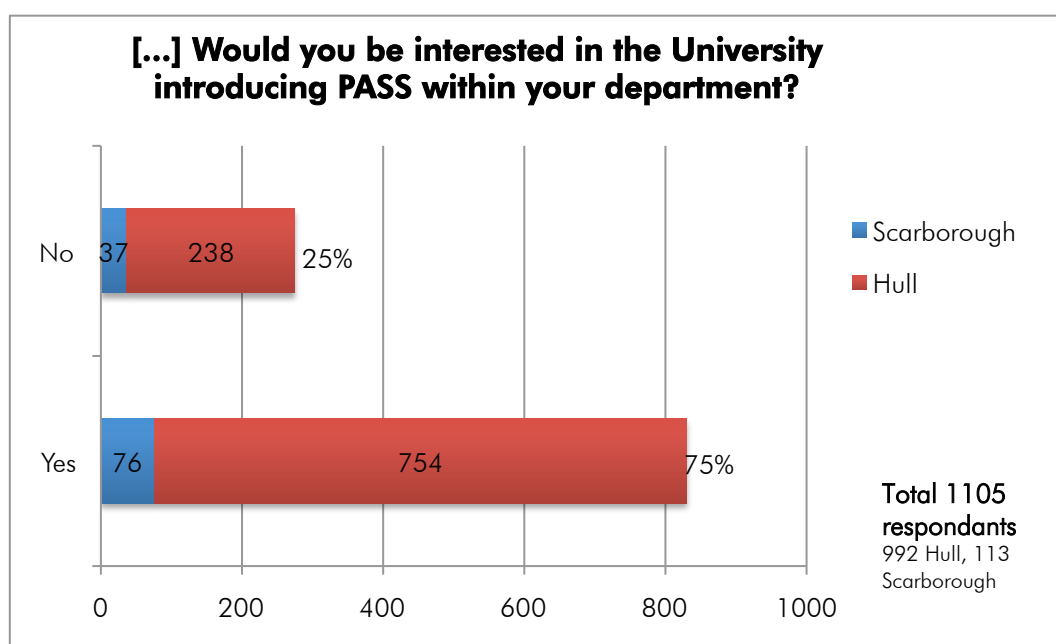
One service that the University of Hull is currently developing is an internationally recognised scheme for providing Supplemental Instruction (SI) to students. SI schemes provide group learning opportunities using the experience of higher year students to support the learning of lower year peers. This supplements existing activity (e.g. lectures and tutorials) and enables active learning in an informal, friendly and fun environment. The SI model was developed at the University of Missouri, Kansas City and has been adapted for use in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the globe whilst maintaining a common core of principles<sup>12</sup>.

Now well established, SI is offered in 1500 institutions in 29 countries, including 29 HEIs in the UK. In the UK, the model has been championed as Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS). PASS sessions provide the same structured, peer-led study support to students, following the globally shared principles of SI.

PASS has the potential to fulfil and compliment some key areas of the HUU strategic plan. To this extent we have been working to support the PASS trials within the Department of Sports, Health and Exercise Science and will continue to do so as it is expanded to Computer Science, Geography, Drama, Modern Foreign Languages and Psychology in the 2012-13 session. Politics and

International Studies will likely be involved from 2013/14. There is interest from Midwifery, HUBS, Physics and Biological Sciences for the 2013/14 year. Further interest has been established by Chemistry, Faculty of Health and Social Care, History, English and Law, with the latter three waiting for the outcomes of the pilot.

HUU believes PASS is a valuable compliment to traditional teaching. Not only does it provide an alternative studying and learning environment, PASS helps inform teaching by highlighting troublesome areas. Consistently there were a significant number of requests for 'study groups' from our memberships as the preferable alternative method of teaching. We believe the PASS model is perhaps the only way of delivering this in a scalable format. In addition, as the PASS scheme recruits students in their second and third years as 'PASS Leaders' the experience provides these volunteers a valuable opportunity to gain experience.



<sup>12</sup> PASS National Centre, PASS National Centre, 2012. (accessed on 28/3/2012: <http://www.pass.manchester.ac.uk/>)

If implemented in departments across the University of Hull, the following benefits, as identified by Ody & Carey<sup>13</sup> can be expected for students within those departments:

- Support the learning experience and involve students as partners in their learning experience
- Assist the transition into and within HE
- Enable enhanced interaction with peers (within and outside year cohort)
- Provide opportunities for students to become more engaged in their course
- Improve academic performance and achievement and increase retention
- Provide an additional mechanism for communication and feedback between teaching staff and students
- Provide further opportunity for the development of intellectual and professional competencies of PASS Leaders and attendees

If PASS is implemented further, HUU should monitor the following potential issues:

1. Inequity as some departments may not offer PASS, or may not have a suitable module to run it for.
2. PASS relies heavily on timetabling. If problems arise it could potentially ground the scheme.
3. Where students study together, there is the potential for 'collusion' accusations. Students need to be careful to work independently on their assessed assignments.

## Recommendations

[ST] HUU is committed to continuing to support PASS as a key, sustainable and internationally recognised vehicle for delivering parts of both the Union and the University of Hull's strategic plans. Our support of PASS ensures that HUU does not duplicate University schemes.

[ST] HUU will review our involvement with PASS annually to ensure it is meeting expectations following its successful pilot in the Department of Sports, Health and Exercise.

[ST] HUU will seek ways to promote PASS and to integrate it with Hi-Lights and the Course Representation system where and when appropriate.

[LT] The introduction of PASS onto the Scarborough Campus needs to be considered.

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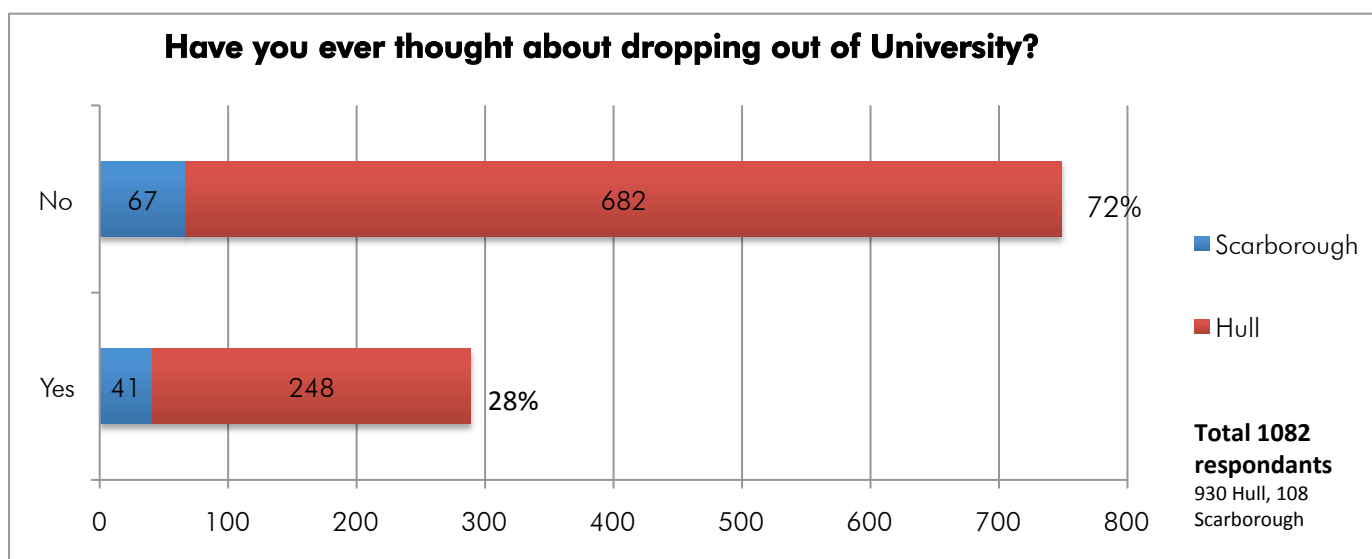
<sup>13</sup> Ody, M. & Carey, W. (n.d.) Demystifying Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS): What...?How...? Who...? Why.... (accessed on 2/4/2012: <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=7418>)

## CHAPTER 3: Student Support and Retention

There are many stakeholders in retention and support. Frontline support is very much provided by academic departments and this support is enhanced through central services such as Library and Learning Innovation (LLI), including the Skills Team, Student Support Services, Student Counselling Service, Careers Service and the HUU Advice Centre. All these services provide specialist support where departments are unable to help. These services seem to be operating well for students, however they need to continue to work with academic departments. This will help to ensure academic departments are correctly informed about what each service offers and when students need to be referred to them.

HUU's largest concerns regarding retention are included in the following sections which stand as the key themes of this chapter.

1. The inconsistent **level of Student Support and Personal Supervisors**.
2. The lack of a **consistent process for determining mitigating circumstances**.
3. **Supporting students who have experienced high levels of trauma**.
4. Ensuring students are provided with the **opportunity, employability and skills** they need for their chosen career fields.
5. The inconsistent **support and induction for postgraduate students**
6. Ensuring **HUU support services** continue to be adequately funded.
7. Ensuring students are adequately informed of any **additional course costs**.

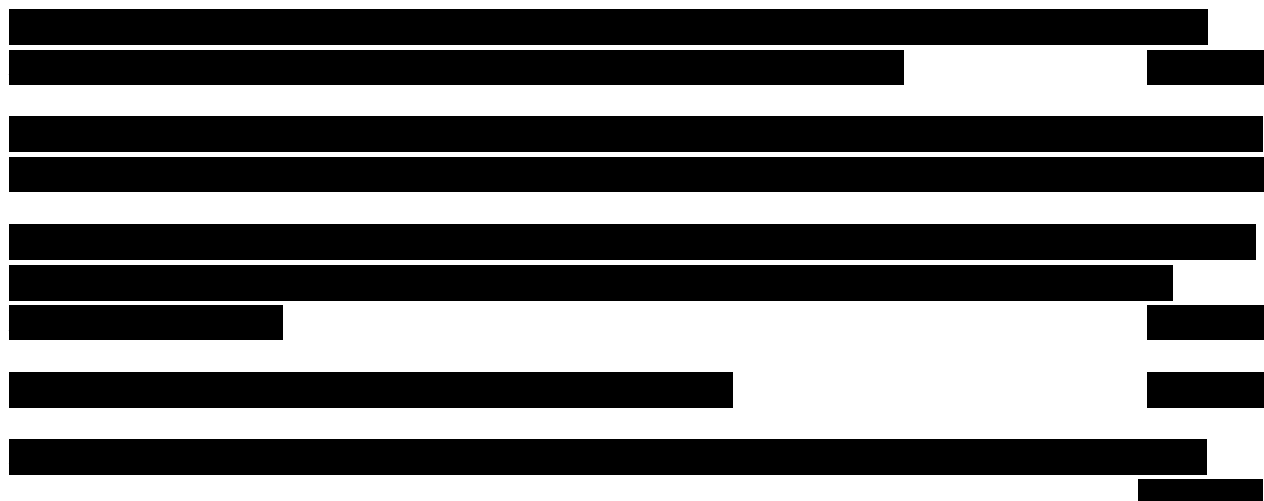


The above graph is taken from the HUU Education Survey 2012 and shows that out of 1082 respondents, 28% of them had considered dropping out of University. This graph shows our success cases as each of these students were able to access the range of support services on offer which helped them stay. Unfortunately many more students do not get the support they need to stay in higher education and decide to leave University. Those students unfortunately were not around to access our survey. We need to continue to tackle the University's retention rates to ensure that all students are supported to stay if that is the best decision for them. HUU believes we have all the support services we need. These services however need to be adequately funded and supported to continue their work. The following chapters highlight concerns student have expressed within each area and offer a number of recommendations towards improvement.

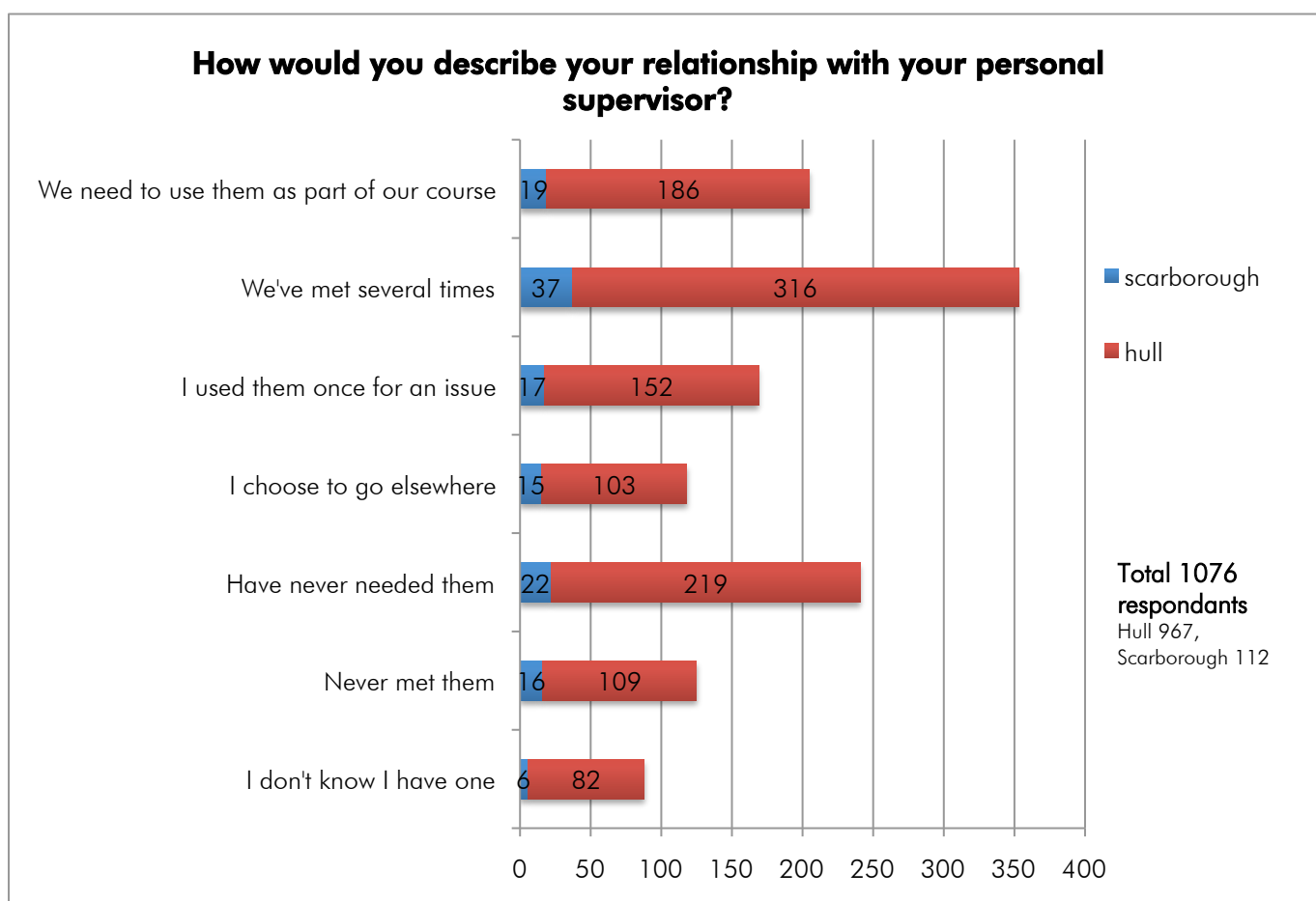


## Student Support and Personal Supervision

HUU is concerned with the personal supervision system due to the variance in supervision quality. While every student should have the support of a personal supervisor, 8% of those we asked in the Education Survey didn't know they had one. While this infers the other students surveyed were aware they had a Personal Supervisor, 11% of students have never met their supervisor and a further 11% choose to go elsewhere for advice. When added to the fact that almost one fifth of students asked say they "have never needed" their supervisor, it is clear some staff involved in the personal supervision system are not fully performing their duties.



These behaviours and attitudes are not acceptable for personal supervisors. The University has a duty of care of its students and should not be pairing students with staff that do not wish to be a supervisor as the support is clearly lacking.



Personal supervisors can be an incredibly effective support mechanism and when effective it can be a great benefit to students. The quotes below show some exemplary personal supervisors that have really helped their students, helping them to feel supported and/or continue at university. Education Survey 2012:

What makes you feel supported?

*Being able to make tutorials and **discuss with personal supervisor**.*

***I have an excellent personal supervisor** and I know other members of the faculty would support me if I needed them too. **I meet my personal and academic supervisor every semester.***

What is the best thing about your department?

*Some **of the personal supervisors within the department are willing to go above and beyond** the required level to help their students.*

***My personal supervisor, \*\*\*\* is there for me to speak to at all times.** I have recently been discussing work experience with him. **He is very supportive and I feel lucky to have him** as my PS.*

Why did you change your mind and not leave university?

*I am a mature student with a young family and a family business. I have sometimes found the work very demanding along with placements. [...] I changed my mind because this is what I have always wanted to do and I am determined to finish University and start the career I should have when I was younger. My family and friends have supported me throughout my time at university and **my personal supervisor has been very supportive.***

*My mum passed away, within the first 6 months of the nursing course starting. I had to intercalate. It was a difficult time for me. However, **I was very much supported by my personal supervisor** and the module leader throughout this time.*

It is unfortunate that all students do not have access to this standard of personal supervision and the University must do more to ensure there is a more consistent standard of support. Personal Supervisors should be approachable to students regarding any issues and they must therefore be well informed of the support services offered by both the University and the Union.

#### Recommendations

[ST] The University need to ensure that all Personal Supervisors are trained to be effective in their duties. Compulsory online training should be completed by all academics who are Personal Supervisors.

[ST] Personal Supervisors **must** maintain contact with their supervisees and see them at least twice a year. They should chase students to arrange these appointments.

## Mitigating Circumstances

The University has no institutional level regulations or code to properly govern the application of mitigating circumstances to students. This has led to a system that gives departments and academic areas a lot of autonomy over how they both process and take into account mitigating circumstances. This means the following for students:

- **The time it takes a department to process and respond to an application for mitigating circumstances varies heavily depending on the department.**

*HUU dealt with a case when a student handed in mitigating circumstances the day after the Mitigating Circumstances Committee. As this department hold their boards monthly, the student has to wait an entire*

month for a response. Unfortunately due to staff illness, that next board was cancelled. This meant the student had to wait an additional month for a response, therefore removing their ability to graduate.

- **There is nothing to ensure judgements are equal and fair. Without any institutional regulations a lot of decisions are down to individual/personal discretion. This means that judgements can vary on an annual basis due to staff turnover within the same department let alone across the institution.**

*A group of eight students living together could theoretically be studying in eight separate departments within the University. A situation could arise if one of these students were involved in an accident and tragically died. Due to the current lack of regulation and standardisation in accepting mitigating circumstances, each of the seven students could receive different responses from their respective departments. This is not acceptable as equal circumstances should be taken into account in equal measure. While this is theoretical, it is a very realistic scenario as HUU has seen cases where students who experience loss are given very different and inconsistent responses.*

*N.B. Students individual needs in times of bereavement can vary due to their own personal circumstance. While HUU believes a move to greater consistency would be of benefit to all students, we appreciate that different help can be extended to students by departments. However this should be based on the needs of students and not departmental bureaucracy.*

- **Departmental responsibilities for processing mitigating circumstance across the institution vary making signposting difficult at an institutional level. Currently the process, by which students get help by mitigating circumstances is non-transparent, poorly explained and badly staffed. Students access help with their studies through a variety of people. Trained services points such Student Support Services and the HUU Advice Centre are not necessarily the first point of call for students seeking help. Students often feel more comfortable speaking to an academic who has taught them. There is currently not enough training given to academics about students' pastoral needs or support services provided within the institution. This makes it virtually impossible for them to communicate this to students. As a result HUU has found that students are often shuffled and redirected between various members of staff within a department, academic area or faculty which makes the process longer and more stressful. More importantly, students are not being signposted to support services that can provide help or that are necessary to the mitigation process, i.e. Disability Services.**

*The HUU Advice Centre dealt with a joint-honours student seeking help with mitigating circumstances pertaining to mental health problems. The student first approached an academic they were comfortable with in one of their departments. This academic passed them onto their Head of Year, who in turn passed them onto the departmental Disabilities Tutor, who in turn referred them to their Head of Department. Each person that the student spoke to claimed to be unable to help as the student was not registered with Disability Services, however not one of them suggested that the student go and get registered with Disability Services. By the time the student had collected evidence and filled in the Mitigating Circumstances form, it was the Easter break and all of the aforementioned academic staff were on holiday. As a result, the only door open to the student was the Departmental Office, where a Departmental Administrator again redirected the student, this time to the Third Floor of University House (but no further direction) where the student eventually discovered that they were eligible for help with Disability Services. This whole process took three weeks and was unnecessarily stressful for the student who was already suffering from documented mental health problems.*

- Students are often unaware what they are experiencing falls within the remit of Disability Services, even if they are aware they need help.

Unfortunately the current mitigating circumstances system is not working for students, leaving them feeling let down when they most need support.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Recommendations**

[ST] A minimum frequency of Mitigating Circumstances Committees need to be clarified within the code of practice. This will ensure no casework takes an unreasonable amount of time to process or prevents a student from graduating. HUU suggests this committee should meet every four weeks as a minimum and that cancelled meetings are rescheduled promptly, including during vacation.

[ST] The University should extend {QH:D2} to include a set of standards that departments must adhere to as a minimum in the application of mitigating circumstances.

[ST] Departments must be aware of their responsibilities in the application of mitigating circumstances, including the communication of the process to students.

[ST] The member of staff with responsibilities for student progress must be a member of the Mitigating Circumstances Committee (see recommendations below)

## Supporting students who have experienced high levels of trauma

Currently there is no support for students who have experienced high levels of trauma within academic departments. While HUU acknowledges the University has a counselling service, there are no trained staff within academic departments to ensure the departmental response in such a situation is appropriate and supportive. HUU is not suggesting departments should be responsible for emotionally supporting students in such cases as a close family bereavement or physical/sexual abuse as this is a job for trained professionals. However, when a student experiences such a situation, departments need to have staff trained to ensure their response is both appropriate and supportive to ensure students are able to continue their studies when they are ready.

*HUU spoke to a student who had received an extension of one week for an essay. They had just lost their grandfather with whom they were very close. While the department had given them some leeway, the student progress officer openly said to the student “I cannot believe we get mitigation for this”.*

*(HUU case study, 2012)*

**Recommendation:**

[ST] Academics with a remit for student progress within their department need to be trained to deal with such circumstances. This role also needs to be publicised to all students. This will help to ensure students are supported to continue their studies.

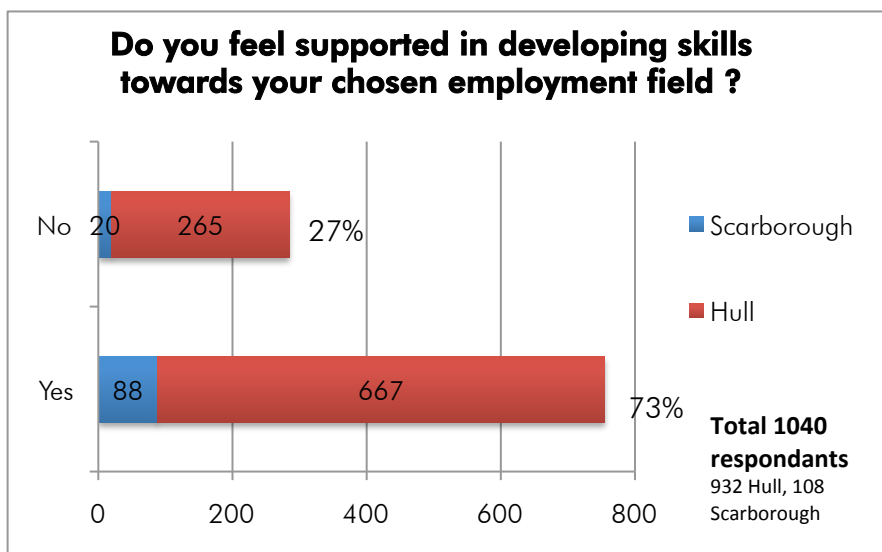
## Opportunity, Employability and Skills

The skills and employability agenda in UK Higher Education (HE) is of growing importance. The new fee rise has generated a national focus on the value of degrees in relation to graduate employability while projects such as co-

curricular awards and the Higher Education Achievement Reports (HEAR) have firmly put a focus on skills. The University of Hull has clearly acknowledged this in their “profile of the distinctive University of Hull Graduate” which sets out the skills the University wishes their graduates to possess:

Our graduates will have acquired expert knowledge and **skills in their chosen academic fields**, enriched by a wide array of professional and **employability skills**, including **ICT and knowledge management skills, skills in critical thinking, communication and presentation skills**, and the ability to work in groups and to take responsibility for themselves. As citizens of our diverse University community, our graduates will have developed the **interpersonal and life skills** to function effectively in a world tolerant of diverse views and committed to resolving disagreements by reasoned argument.<sup>14</sup>

While the University has this bold strategic aim, 27% of students surveyed felt they were not supported in developing skills towards their chosen employment fields. This is clearly an issue that needs to be tackled as part of fulfilling the strategic plan. The NUS/QAA Student Experience Research<sup>15</sup> showed that in the sector 78.2% of students felt to some extent that their course would prepare them for their chosen employment field, further indicating room for improvement at the University of Hull.



More importantly, some students are beginning to question the value of a degree and are concerned that they may genuinely be better off going straight into work as opposed to continuing at University.

*[I] Felt that it would be better to get a job and work my way up as I feel the lack of jobs out there means even after getting a degree, employers are going to know that I want a job and will therefore offer me the same amount of money to work for them even if I was to start straight after college.*  
(Education Survey, 2012)

*'Why am I doing this degree? What purpose is it for?'*

(Education Survey, 2012)

## Recommendations

[ST] The University should continue to meet its commitment to produce HEAR reports. These should at a minimum include an enhanced transcript with further details about the University and the modules a student studied. Basic additional information such as departmental prizes and award winners in the HUU volunteer awards should also be included. Caution should be shown before including enhancements above this as there is no evidence at this point to prove HEARs work or are useful for students entering the job market. Where ever additional enhancements can be included without significant investment this should be considered.

<sup>14</sup> University of Hull (2012) The distinctive “University of Hull graduate”, The Strategic Plan 2011-2015: [http://www2.hull.ac.uk/hideplan/strategic\\_plan/3\\_empowering\\_people/312\\_the\\_distinctive\\_university.aspx](http://www2.hull.ac.uk/hideplan/strategic_plan/3_empowering_people/312_the_distinctive_university.aspx)

<sup>15</sup> NUS & QAA (2012): Student Experience Research 2012 – Part 1 Teaching



[ST] The University should develop a co-curricular award to help students articulate skills to employers that they have gained across both the curricular and extracurricular.

[ST] HUU and the University **must** ensure that students on both Hull and Scarborough Campus have ample opportunity to develop and articulate all the skills defined in the profile of the 'distinctive University of Hull graduate' and the University skills matrix. Additional opportunities should be developed for students as part of this.



## Support and Induction for Postgraduate Students

HUU held a referendum in our semester two elections to choose our priority campaign for the 2012-13 academic year. This referendum was open for all of our membership to vote on and "ensuring postgraduate study at the University of Hull remains affordable and accessible" was selected as priority. While a major part of this campaign will involve lobbying nationally for funding support, there is a lot of work we can do at the local level to ensure study is accessible. A crucial part of this will be working with the University to ensure our postgraduate students are supported.

This summer HUU led two focus groups with current postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) students to look at how we can enhance the support, representation and communication we provide for them. We used this opportunity to look at how we could work with the University to improve the student experience of postgraduates as well as what services the University needs to improve.

*[Hull] is the undergraduate University. The University doesn't work for us. As soon as the undergraduates leave everything closes down over the summer. I cannot even get a cup of coffee past 3pm... Everything here is set up to cater to undergraduate students. You even have the audacity to call it vacation hours when we are still here! All this is a shame and devalues the experience for those who are not conventional undergraduates.*

*(Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

Clearly a lot of issues were discussed within these focus groups and we have been able to draw up 6 priorities to enhance the postgraduate experience at Hull:

1. Improving postgraduate induction.
2. Providing social opportunities for postgraduates.
3. Introducing thematic representation for postgraduate students.
4. Helping to improve the Postgraduate Training Modules.
5. Enhancing the services provided by the Graduate school and the working environments within the building.
6. Providing informal opportunities for postgraduates to share their research.

The following sections will address each of the above issues and suggest recommendation.

### Improving postgraduate induction

Due to the nature of study, PGR students can arrive at any time of the year. Induction for these students seems to be highly inconsistent and heavily dependent upon their research supervisors. Some PGR experience excellent

inductions that provide them with the detailed information they need, giving them a departmental induction and providing campus tours. In contrast some students are literally shown to their desk and 'left to get on with it'. The problems surrounding poor inductions intensified in cases where students were international.

*The only thing I was given really was a map of the campus. Even then it didn't provide any useful information about where I was in relation to anywhere else. You can probably tell from my accent that I am from Australia. I didn't even know the names of your shops so didn't know where to buy food or clothes.*

*(Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

*I was literally shown a desk and my computer. No one introduced me to anyone in the department other than my supervisors.*

*(Postgraduate focus group 1, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

**Recommendations** [ST] A best practice induction for PGR students should be developed by HUU and the Graduate School. All research supervisors should deliver this as a **mandatory** part of supervising research students.

### **Providing social opportunities for postgraduates**

The focus groups were dominated by PGR students who had found it very difficult settling into the University as there were very few mechanisms for them to meet new people and make friends. This was particularly an issue for students who had no undergraduate (UG) experience at the University of students who were from overseas.

*I attended a good event once. It was an informal event for mature students with cheese & wine*

*(Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

*As a research student I feel stuck in the middle without any infrastructure to meet people or talk*

*(Postgraduate focus group 1, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

**Recommendations** [ST] HUU should establish a Postgraduates Association to champion and support social opportunities for postgraduate.

### **Introducing thematic representation for postgraduate students**

Currently no formal means of representation exists for postgraduates. The current code of practice, "Partnerships with Students in the Management of Quality and Standards"<sup>16</sup> is applicable only to UG and PGT students. While many departments have the good practice of having PhD student representation this is not a requirement. HUU currently provides no bespoke training for these representatives.

*I don't think the rep system works for us. It sounds great for undergraduates but we have different issues.*

*(Postgraduate focus group 1, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

**Recommendations** [ST] HUU should provide bespoke training to any Course Representatives who are PGT or PGR students.  
[ST] HUU should provide bespoke meetings for PGT and PGR students on a thematic basis to discuss academic issues. These should be supported by Postgraduates Association and chaired by a student.

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<sup>16</sup> CDTE (2012) Partnerships with students in the management of quality and standards, Quality Handbook {QH:K2}

## Helping to improve the Postgraduate Training Modules

In our focus groups we received a lot of feedback on the Postgraduate training modules. Students felt they did nothing to support their studies and if anything they were a real hindrance as they are forced upon students to do. While some students appreciated the ability to take extra modules and an extra qualification for doing so, they also acknowledged that the modules could be more relevant. Generally speaking the science students felt the modules were designed for arts students, and vice versa, clearly showing they are not really working for anyone at present. Some students even claimed they would refuse to complete their modules as they felt them to be redundant.

*These modules divert you away from your research and they don't seem to add to the research process.*

*I am worried that the real benefits accrued are weakened by the differing form of PhDs between individuals and disciplines*

*This centralised system doesn't necessarily reflect the variety.*

*Why can't they make them voluntary so that we all aren't forced to reach a threshold. It makes me feel like they are trying to gain brownie points with external funding bodies.*

*(Postgraduate focus group 1, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

### Recommendations

[ST] A review should be done of each postgraduate training module.

[ST] The handbook listing all the available modules needs to be redesigned to make it more accessible. Currently it is hard to navigate or to find relevant modules.

[ST] Consideration needs to be given for the volume of students not engaging with the system and needs to be further developed to encourage PGR students to partake.

## Enhancing the services provided by the Graduate school and the working environments within the building

HUU received a lot of complaints about the Graduate School. As a building students find it 'poorly equipped', 'unwelcoming' and 'depressing' (*Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012*). The building is poorly organised structurally and does not offer a lot of space for students to use. The spaces it does provide are described as dank, dark and dated.

*That building is the very last place on campus I would choose to go. I've only ever been there once.*

*The building itself is used as a social space and as a research space which causes obvious problems*

*I wasn't even aware the place existed. My department said nothing.*

*The building is set up for coursework students rather than PhD students*

*(Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012)*

When considering the services provided by the Graduate School, students had a heavily split opinion. Some students noted staff to be particularly helpful while others accused them of being "micro-managed" and unsupportive, demonstrating "little initiative or readiness to give answers" (*Postgraduate focus group 2, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012*).

### Recommendations

[LT] The Graduate School is in need of either investment or replacement. As the University seeks to build a research culture and increase the number of PGT and PGR students it is clear this building is incapable of supporting them in its current format.

## Providing informal opportunities for postgraduates to share their research

Several other Unions have been providing opportunities for the PGR students to partake in informal seminar series. While many departments currently offer these, little opportunity exists outside of a student's subject area. HUU believes that this will not only be a valuable social opportunity for PGR students, but we believe it will help them practice presenting their research among peers but without the pressure of doing it within department. This idea was introduced at the focus groups and was heavily supported by the students present.

**Recommendations** [ST] The Graduate School and the Postgraduate Association should introduce an informal seminar series for PGR students to engage with.

## HUU's Support Services

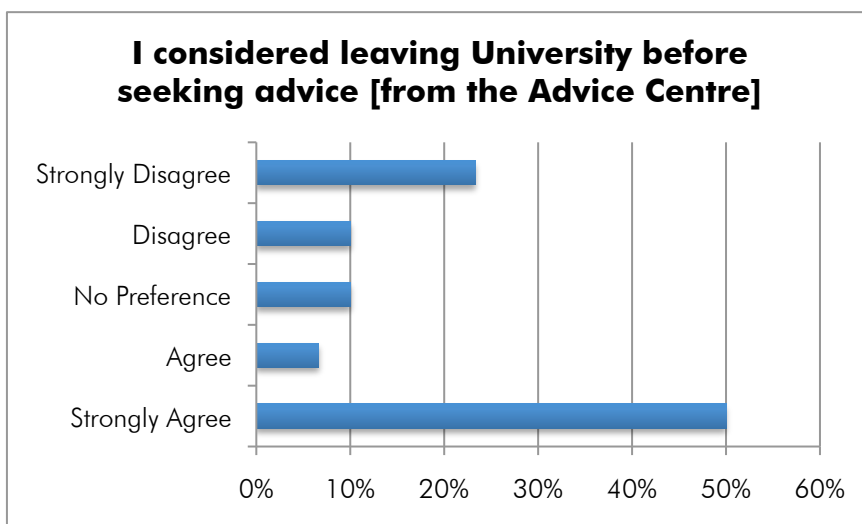
In everything that HUU does, we want to be our members 1<sup>st</sup> choice every time<sup>17</sup>. All of our objectives play an important role in retention by providing students with social, employment and volunteering opportunities as well as activities and sports. This helps ensure our members can establish friendship groups, have fun as part of their student experience (theme 6) as well as give them the opportunity to gain important life skills (theme 5)<sup>18</sup>.

*Course not as interesting as I was led to believe and didn't enjoy the working environments... I stayed at University because of friends and sports teams*

*Didn't think I was getting enough out of my course. Involvement in sports clubs kept me in uni*

*[What makes you feel supported?] sports and course reps*

Further to the opportunities that HUU provides that enhance the student experience, we also run several support services for students. HUU's key success themes include supporting our members to enable them to have a positive experience at the University of Hull (theme 4) and supporting the education of our members (theme 1). As part of this and following the recommendations in last year's Student Written Submission, HUU has invested in an additional Adviser in the Advice Centre based at Hull. To enhance support on the Scarborough campus we have introduced an additional Adviser who works one day a week throughout term time.



The Advice Centre is there to support students with any issues they may experience – from academic issues, debt problems and housing issues the Advice Centre has it covered. Through the breadth of the services offered, the Advice Centre is a key support service at the University and plays a vital role in retention. For the 2011-12 academic session 50% of clients surveyed had considered dropping out before using the service.

*I would like to thank you and everyone at the advice centre for your ongoing advice and support. Without your sympathetic ears I can say with some confidence I would have left university by now*

*(Advice Centre Survey 2011-12)*

<sup>17</sup> HUU (2012) Strategy 2011-14, Hull University Union

<sup>18</sup> HUU (2012) Strategy 2011-14, Hull University Union

*I went to Advice Centre and I had more than one issue, every single time advisers always helped. Especially Kate Falconer, as she understood my issues and she always try to help and she always did. **Thank you for the advice centre, as without them I will not be here.***

*(Advice Centre Survey 2011-12)*

*I would definitely add that advice centre is a really the best place for students to go and seek advice on their personal and academic matters. Julie Chambers (my case worker) is immensely appreciable. She in true sense has given me a new direction in my life. I am very thankful to her for all her wonderful work and time she has given me and still giving me to resolve my issues. **I and my family will always remain grateful for all her contribution towards our lives.***

*(Advice Centre Survey 2011-12)*

*(Advice*

Course Representatives and our Education Team provide valuable support to students as well. While our course representation system is reviewed later in this submission, it must be acknowledged that by listening to students and enhancing their learning experience through representation we can help support and retain students.

*[I was going to leave University because of] Disabilities, **I changed my mind because of the support of the Education Coordinator at HUU***

*(Education Survey, 2012)*

**Recommendations** [ST] HUU should continue to review its support services annually ensuring they are adequately resourced, promoted and staffed.

*N.B. Recommendations for the course representation system can be found later in this submission.*

## Costs of Study

HUU has identified three kinds of costs associated with University study and has defined them as follows:

### Mandatory Costs

These costs arise from studying core/compulsory modules. Information on these costs must to be available to students at the time of application. **Examples of mandatory costs are:**

- Fees
- Materials (cavass, paint, clay, textiles)
- CRB
- Learning Resources
- Studio/Laboratory

### Necessarily Incurred Costs

These are not a direct result of undertaking core modules, may not be experienced by all students and will vary with student circumstances. General information needs to be available to students from time of application in case they will be applicable. **Examples of necessarily incurred costs are:**

- Living costs
- Accommodation
- Car Parking
- Care costs for dependants
- Adjustments for disabled students to address their needs.

### **Optional Costs**

Optional costs are incurred only as a result of student choice of module. Institutions should aim to provide students with an indication of optional costs in order to inform student module choice. Given that prospective students will make institutional choices often on the basis of module variety and opportunity, it would be desirable to publicise such costs at point of application.

Hull University Union has undertaken research into mandatory costs that students have had to undertake as part of their studies at the University of Hull. The survey was conducted across both campuses and received 1108 responses. Students were asked what mandatory expenses they occurred as part of their core (non-optional studies). We then asked students to label which of the expenses they were unaware they would have to pay for before undertaking their studies. Results are shown on the following page.