

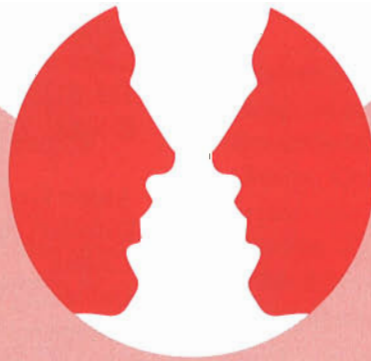
A M O S S H E

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Editorial

"What we hope for this publication is that it makes connections for you, whether you are managing a service, running an institution, offering a specialist professional service, or planning the next major change in higher education. Too often policies and practice have been developed in isolation from other parts of the system; and we hope that this journal will take a small step towards encouraging a more holistic approach." This quotation is from the editorial in CONNECT's first issue, six years ago. We very much hope that CONNECT has made some interesting connections for you, and that it continues to do so.

Would you like to contribute to the process yourself, with an article or report or book review for possible inclusion in a future issue? If you would, any member of our editorial group will be pleased to hear from you.

Warm thanks are extended to all those who have contributed material for this issue.

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Developments and Structures of Student Services

Joan Newton, Anglia Polytechnic University

Background

What follows is the promised summary of the research findings of my dissertation on the Strategic Development of Student Services in APU for C21st to which several colleagues contributed by completing a survey questionnaire. I also surveyed Heads of Careers Services using a similar questionnaire.

The response to the surveys was encouraging with a total of 28 replies from 27 different institutions, 59.5% of those surveyed, giving a good cross section of experience in the higher education sector in the UK.

15 responses were received from Heads of Student Services, 13 from Heads of Careers Services. Not surprisingly, Heads of Student Services departments took a much broader view than the specialist Heads of Careers Service, reflecting their need to balance resources over a number of different support areas.

In responses to both surveys there was emphasis on the increased pressures placed on all staff in recent years - with new demands faced both from larger numbers of students and from institutions seeking to impose additional responsibilities - and the generally creative response from staff in finding new ways of working to keep pace with change. Not all respondents answered the full questionnaire so percentages given relate to the level of actual response to an individual question.

Student Services Budgets and Staffing

Overall budgets under the control of Heads range from £220k to £7m. Where these can be identified, budgets for consumables run from £20k to £78k. There is increasing emphasis on the need for external funding and this is demonstrated by the sums Services are required to generate. Of the respondents, 33% were required to generate little or no income, 22% between £7-12k, 33% between £146-180k and 11% approximately £900k. The sums in excess of £146k include nursery and sports fees.

Although departments vary dramatically in size, there is a high degree of consistency in what services are now, or have been until recently, included. 93% include Childcare to some extent and Counselling, 87% Careers, 80% Student Money Advice, 73% Health, and 60% some aspect of Accommodation. There is also consistency in new services that have been taken on board with 60% adding Chaplaincy and 33% Disability Support. Some medical services are provided in-house, others by a local GP practice.

Front line staff dealing with students on a one-to-one basis account for 8 - 35 full-time staff; staff who do not deal with students as a primary activity (e.g. nursery or clerical assistants) account for 0 - 31 staff and others (e.g. wardens and cleaners) for 0 - 64 additional posts. One new university employs 62 established staff and 64 on a consultancy or contract basis. Student numbers range from 4541 to 17,995 undergraduates (HESA 1998) but the number of staff employed does not necessarily reflect the size of the institution or the range of services offered.

Power and influence

Student Services generally report to senior management within the vertical structure of the organisation, with 53% reporting directly to the Principal/Provost or Vice Principal; however there is no consistency in the horizontal structure with departments being part of the Learning, Academic or Secretariat functions.

Student Services is represented, usually by the Head, on a variety of committees from Academic Board/Senate to Corporate or Strategic Planning Groups, Quality Committees as well as the more predictable Student Affairs Committee. At one extreme, 2 Heads (13%) are part of the Senior Management Group, at the other 3 (20%) Services are represented at low level or not at all.

What is noticeable is the numbers of instances when the personal views of senior managers about Student Services appear to have a major

influence on the position of the department; changes in staffing at these levels are often recorded as affecting the way in which the department is perceived within the institution. It is important to have a sponsor or champion somewhere in the senior levels of the hierarchy.

Additional responsibilities

Colleagues listed a total of 39 additional responsibilities, in 23 distinct functions, taken on in the last five years, the most common (47%) being disability support. Although 42% of respondents said staffing ratios had been maintained in the face of these additional responsibilities, one of these commented that staffing had "never been adequate" and another that they were "still lean" suggesting that the apparently positive response is misleading.

Institutional factors affecting perceptions of Student Services

The most widespread factors affecting perceptions of the department within institutions relate to Quality and Audit issues. Almost 50% of respondents commented that quality review, whether internal or external, had had a positive effect in pulling student support higher up on the agenda and leading to a better liaison with academic staff.

The other most common factor has already been referred to i.e. the attitude of senior staff to the department. 40% of respondents commented on loss of influence, declining staff morale, a low profile within the institution and negative effects on budget allocations arising out of changes in priorities between senior staff, changes in reporting lines and restructuring leading to a "downgrading" of the role of the department.

External factors affecting the way in which Student Services works

1. Again, quality assessment factors are mentioned.
2. The major change is regarded as being in the area of student funding with 67% commenting on aspects such as the introduction of student contribution towards fees, Access Funds, the increased demand for student money advice. Resulting effects are identified as:

- changes in student/parental perceptions of appropriate levels of service
- demands for increased quality and efficiency without any increase in resources
- greater collaboration between staff in Student Services and the Finance department.

3. The increasing need for students to work part-time has also affected the work of the Careers Service and the resultant pressures have led to an increase demand amongst students for counselling. The increasing importance of student funding issues has led to "an increased recognition of our work and destroyed the assumption that we are a small service for a few 'problem students'." It appears that this is the single most influential factor in the development of Student Services departments at the present time.

Changing demands and responsive services

All participants identified an increase in student demand. As expected, this is partially the result of an increase in student numbers, i.e. a demand for more of the same, and partially a demand for different types of support from a more diverse student population, i.e. more but different services. The main individual areas of growth are in the student money advice; careers advice, education and employability; and support for disabled students. There has also been an appreciable increase in demand from institutions themselves for facts and figures both to support quality issues and respond to the growing national emphasis on employability and League Tables with First Destination data.

Individual departments have been very creative in responding to the general increase in demand but the main emphases of action lie in 4 key areas:

- the development of much more self-help material
- a move towards shorter consultations and Duty Adviser sessions
- a move away from specialist support for the majority of enquirers
- a review of policies, procedures and structures.

The use of information technology has made a major difference to the way in which services to customers are delivered. Services have reduced the need for staff to give much basic information by making it available in self-help form via

computer. Demands for administrative and clerical support have been reduced as a result and posts restructured. Some departments are using the Web as a way of disseminating information and communicating to students, and see it taking on even more importance in the future.

80% of respondents indicated moves towards more flexible delivery of services by means of shorter consultations; emergency slots for counselling and a ceiling on the number of sessions per student; longer opening times and focusing staff resources on periods of peak demand.

A major development in some Services has been the move away from the majority of clients being seen by a specialist adviser towards a "triage" type of approach. This gives a more important role for trained reception and information staff who screen all visitors and handle the vast majority of enquiries themselves; they then allocate a smaller group to the Duty Adviser for more detailed work and an even smaller group to the specialist adviser for in-depth support. Whilst reducing the specialist help received by the majority, this also ensures maximum efficiency in the use of more expensive staff resources. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of staff in this screening role and the training they receive.

Staff have not been unaffected by these changes. 60% respondents had identified overwork, stress, low morale and illness amongst their staff at some time. However, changes in working practices need not be totally negative and several Heads commented on the positive impact of new learning opportunities and the ongoing commitment of staff to providing the best service they can to the greatest number of students. Where morale was regarded as high and sickness rates had fallen, this was thought to be due to policies allowing staff flexibility and personal development together with an strong emphasis on a good working environment.

To boldly go.....

Questions relating to current developmental work and future expectations brought a wide range of individual solutions to what are primarily seen as resource issues. Solutions appear to lie in three alternative strategies:

- making more effective and efficient use of available resources

- obtaining additional resources paid for by external funding
- trying to justify an increase in budget by raising the profile and perceived value of the department within the institution.

Much has already been done across the sector to improve efficiency but a number of other initiatives have been identified.

1. Better marketing of services will raise the profile of the department within the institution and, while it is likely to increase the proportion of the student body being reached and made aware of what is available, it will also provide evidence with which to argue the case for higher priority with senior management.

2. A closer identification with the academic structure, by delivery of (mainly careers) services within academic programmes, and better representation within the committee structure are both seen as means of increasing credibility and influence.

3. The partial external resourcing of services is seen as an area for expansion. As a variation on this some institutions are limiting their expenditure by contracting out facilities, such as halls of residence, to management companies. Where one-to-one services are concerned, a major difficulty of outsourcing would lie in continuing to ensure effective provision of a Service outside the context of a close involvement with the institution that gives understanding. As one respondent commented "the difficulty is to find a way to keep the babies but change the bath water."

4. Developing "coherence" is seen as essential by several colleagues. Some talk of reviewing provision to ensure a clear demarcation between Student Services, the Student Union, other Central Services and academic departments to prevent duplication of services. Policies and procedures are seen as in need of revision to simplify them - so they are less in need of expert interpretation - and make them more transparent.

5. The ability to measure quality and standards is seen as becoming increasingly important and some colleagues regard Service Level Agreements as a means of defining provision to all users. Others see this as a way of identifying

the "true cost" of different services necessary for the most effective allocation of scarce resources.

Horses for Courses

There are six distinct models of Student Services identifiable from the sample:

Model 1 Keep it simple, fair and transparent, ensuring that services are provided for ALL students not just those with "problems" and procedures are geared to giving a straightforward answer quickly.

Model 2 Make the best use of limited available resources and target them to meet the demands of those groups of students most in need, leaving others to fend for themselves.

Model 3 Organise the structure and composition of Student Services on a process basis, ie grouping resources together according to the aspect of the educational process they are dealing with. An example would be an Access and Guidance department which integrates the whole of what might be termed the educational guidance process - widening participation, student recruitment, on-course support, preparation for employment and continuing education.

Model 4 Strongly dependent on externally funded services, with 3 variations:

- outsourced
- project-based
- income driven

Model 5 Uses the triage system to offer a broad-brush approach for the many tapering to a very specialist service for the few.

Model 6 Draws on the resources of the local area and does not seek to duplicate what is already provided there.

Conclusions

It is clear that some Services will find the move into the 21st century smoother and less traumatic than others. There are marked differences in how Services are perceived by their institutions and the extent to which those institutions have progressed towards a client-centred culture. For some, mainly the new universities and colleges, wider participation has been a reality for several years and carries no threat, whilst others will find it increasingly difficult to live in an era of mass higher education without great upheaval.

When staff operate within their own, relatively narrow, working environment they remain committed and motivated to find ways of offering the best possible service to users; they enjoy their work. It is only when they see themselves and their work as undervalued within the organisation that morale suffers. This need not be the case. There are Heads who write enthusiastically about the benefits of

- wider staff development
- enabling staff to be proactive
- introducing flexitime and other flexible working practices and
- providing a good working environment, as a means of encouraging and motivating staff to see the opportunities presented by the need to change and to respond positively. Many senior managers in higher education in the UK could learn much from them.

Respondents	England	Ireland	Scotland	Wales	Total
Old University	7	1	2		10
New University	9	1	1	1	12
College of HE	5				5
Total	21	2	3	1	27

Student Support in a New Era of Higher Education The Example of Middlesex University

Professor Dennis Hardy, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Middlesex University

This paper (which is based on a presentation to the annual AMOSSHE conference in July 1999), is organised in two parts – the first setting the scene of a changing context for student support in higher education, and the second describing and evaluating a particular approach that has been introduced at Middlesex University.

Changing Context for Student Support

Those of us who have experienced firsthand the changes over the past decade will probably agree that the pattern of higher education in this country has been transformed; it is fundamentally different from how it was, and the past for which there is a lingering nostalgia will never return. With few exceptions, future generations of students will never know what it is like to attend tutorials in a comfortable study with a few others; to receive a cheque at the start of each term that would be enough to see them through without running into debt; nor to get onto the tramlines of their degree course and not have to worry about choosing new combinations. Instead, a new era has emerged, not necessarily worse than the past and in some ways obviously better, but certainly different. The extent of this difference with the past can be shown through six related developments.

Firstly there are many more students in higher education than there used to be – some 1.6 million at the present time. At the start of the 1960s, higher education remained an elitist system, with only 6% of the eighteen year cohort gaining access. Now the figure is nearer to one in three, and national targets will take this proportion higher still, to at least one in two. This considerable increase has been by no means regular over time, the sharpest increase being over a five year period from 1988 to 1993; for those who experienced this it was as if mass higher education had arrived overnight. The rest of the 1990s has been a time of consolidation and adjustment to these large numbers.

Secondly, a result of this increase in numbers has been the potential burden on the taxpayer, to a level that a majority of politicians from all parties have found unacceptable. The outcome has been to shift some of these additional costs from the

taxpayer to the consumer. In practical terms this has led to the maintenance grant being fast eroded in favour of parental contributions, coupled with the introduction of means tested payments by students of some of their own fees. Student loans and access funds to compensate for the loss of housing benefit entitlement also feature in this brave new financial world.

Thirdly, this changing financial context is already leading to a different social milieu in higher education. Students, who are treated as consumers in financial terms, are increasingly behaving as consumers in the classroom. They cannot be criticised for doing so, since they will see education as a service that they are purchasing and for which they will expect the same standards of response to their needs that they experience elsewhere in the market place.

Fourthly, following on from the preceding point, higher education itself is being driven now more by demand than by traditional supply factors. So long as only a small proportion of students were admitted to the halls of academia, then provision could be shaped as it always has been, in response to the specialisms of academics. A restricted range of subjects was on offer, the quality of teaching and assessment was not in question, and the normal mode of study was for three years full-time. Such an inflexible and unresponsive approach is no longer possible; universities, in order to survive, have both to respond to market trends and also to compete within the sector to attract and retain students.

Fifthly, for political reasons, as well as simple responding to consumer demands (and also making use of new technology), higher education is starting to offer and infinitely more complex array of provision. Under the banner of lifelong learning, the traditional offering of full-time and part-time modes is being extended by weekend and summer schools, by work-based learning and in-house corporate training, and by distance learning for a global market. Reflecting changing careers patterns, with an expectation of frequent moves within and across career boundaries, lifelong learning is an essential adjunct of this

new labour market as well as continuing to perform its more traditional adult education role.

And, finally, the loosening of boundaries between different sectors of education is leading to something of a continuum between schools, further and higher education. The looser boundary with further education is especially important: with new links between the two sectors to ease access, and also with an increasing proportion of higher education being undertaken in the former. Indeed, the government is looking more to the colleges to enable its cohort targets to be achieved.

Inevitably, these contextual changes in higher education all impinge in different ways on the provision of student support, affecting not only what is needed by students but also ways in which support might be organised. As every student support worker will know, there are more students to serve, the student population itself is more diverse than it used to be, and students as consumers are more demanding. Long past is the day when the system could rely on an erratic network of personal tutors, with few specialists in the background to deal with extreme cases. Moreover, a need for effective support services is heightened by the fact of growing competition between institutions, which are forced increasingly to distinguish themselves in the marketplace. A demonstrable ability to care for students, not only school-leavers but also late returners, can be an important selling point for a university; equally, this is a point of growing interest at overseas recruitment fairs. Additionally, in the face of increasing public expenditure, one measure of accountability (exercised by the Quality Assurance Agency in its subject assessments) is the effectiveness of an institution's system of support and guidance.

For all these reasons, a highly professional system of support is now an essential feature of mass higher education: with the aim of advising students within their institutions, and of giving them the tools they need to navigate in their external environment. No commercial enterprise can afford to ignore the importance of customer care, and although many academics still find it offensive to draw on this kind of commercial experience, nor can universities. Those universities which ignore this will inevitably pay a price in terms of student entry, withdrawal and achievement rates.

The Challenge at Middlesex

The challenge facing Middlesex is probably not much different from that facing many other large universities, and for that reason our particular form of response may be of wider interest. Our experience is offered, not necessarily as a model that would suit all other institutions, but as an illustration of the kind of situation that we are all facing and of one particular way of dealing with it. Middlesex is a modern university, dating from 1992, with previous experience as a polytechnic, itself formed from autonomous colleges distributed across north London.

The particular challenge for student support (within the wider context of change outlined above) is fourfold. One set of issues has to do with the sheer number of students. There are some 23,000 students on full and part-time courses, and a further 8,000 who attend for short courses. To these totals one must take into account strong links with a network of further education colleges in the region, some of which have formed with Middlesex a partnership that is already looking at ways to share certain services. In planning terms, the prospect of providing an integrated system of support to well in excess of 100,000 students is not unrealistic. A second set of issues is in relation to the dispersed nature of the university, with seven major campuses and some smaller ones, over a wide sector of North London (as well as one in Bedford). The challenge here is to ensure that students are able to enjoy a consistent standard and range of service, wherever they are based. A third set of issues has to do with the needs of a very diverse student population, distinguished not least of all by its multi-culturalism. In part, this is a reflection of the location of Middlesex in a culturally mixed area, attracting students from a wide range of communities; and in part it is a product of a growing proportion of students from around the world. Finally, student support has to contend not only with generic needs, but also with the varying problems of students in different programmes in a totally modularised scheme. In this, the requirements of nursing students, for instance, are different in timing and nature from those in, say, the performing arts.

Until 1997, the core system of student support was organised centrally, under the direction of a Head of Student Services. However, some related services were organised separately: notably, educational guidance was managed on a subject basis, with all academics undertaking an advisory role, supported by a part-time Director of Studies

on each campus. Student administration was also managed as a separate operation. The overall system of student support was, therefore, one that has evolved incrementally from a previous era of higher education, and was not at that stage unified. A reorganisation of the academic structure of the University in 1997 offered a timely opportunity to build on this experience and to design a bespoke system for a new set of demands.

Creating a New System

The starting point in the design of a new support system was the key phrase in the university's mission statement, that Middlesex is a 'student centred university'. That simple but fundamental commitment was to prove the driver that would shape not only the mechanics of the new system of student support but also the culture of the institution as a whole.

What emerged from the restructuring exercise was a tripartite system of School (which were a product of removing a tier in the previous academic structure), Corporate Services (left largely unchanged), and the introduction of a third element, Campus Student Support Teams. This latter group inherited the work undertaken by the former Student Services, together with a wide range of campus-based registrarial functions, and also the key area of student advice (previously dispersed between some 500 academics). The idea was to create an integrated, highly professional, student centred service on each of the campuses. Campus Deans of Students (CDSs) were appointed on a full-time basis to lead these teams. A mission statement for the CDSs was prepared, as follows:

In line with the student-centred mission of the university, the Campus Dean of Students and his/her team will:

- *promote the interests of all students associated with the campus and related halls of residence;*
- *provide a friendly, integrated service to support the student learning experience;*
- *work effectively and cooperatively with Schools and Services to provide the best possible campus learning environment.*

In practice, each CDS (six of whom were formerly academics, and one an administration manager), were required to bring together staff previously under different lines of management and to create integrated student support teams on each campus. All set up shop within a strictly

defined budget envelope, and all were required to organise their teams on the basis of a flat management structure. University-wide services (counselling, careers etc.) are organised as part of this campus-based structure, through the appointment of co-ordinators; each coordinator has a university brief but is responsible to one CDS. The CDSs themselves were initially in the line management of a Pro Vice-Chancellor and, more recently in place of the former, a full-time Director for Students.

The range of functions dealt with by each of the student support teams is extensive. Some of these functions relate specifically to student administration and advice, and include the following:

- admissions and open days
- assessment
- educational advice
- enrolment
- fee collection
- induction
- module registration
- scholarships and loans
- student debt
- student complaints and discipline
- student records

Other functions include those commonly associated with a Student Services unit:

- careers advice
- chaplaincy
- counselling
- employment bureau (for part-time work)
- health advice
- international student support
- placements
- Project Able (for students with disabilities)
- student advice centres
- welfare rights

Although student accommodation, childcare and sports may also be included in other institutions in Student Services, at Middlesex these are regarded as commercial operations and are managed by the Estates and Facilities Service.

Over the first couple of years of operation, minor works budgets have been used to co-locate, as far as possible, the various parts of what were formerly separate services. Combined with staff development and cooperation between staff on a daily basis, the student support teams have already achieved a high level of integration. We

tend not to use the overworked term 'one stop shop', but that, effectively, is what it is.

Taking Stock

Two years on, how well has the new system fared? It was certainly innovatory when introduced and cut across established lines of management and traditional ways of doing things; some colleagues were inevitably sceptical about its chances of success. But, to date, the system has demonstrated some undoubted advantages.

Of these, the first (and most probably most important) is that there is now a more coherent and comprehensive system of support for students. This is evident on individual campuses, as well as in terms of consistency of approach across the university as a whole. In organisational terms, an integrated management structure is proving to be both efficient and effective. Another advantage is that the system is designed not only to support students in direct terms, but also to save the time of academics to enable a greater concentration on their key tasks of teaching and research. The professionalised advice service alone represents a saving of some 1000 hours weekly of academic staff time (on the basis of a previous two-hourly weekly allocation for advice work). Additionally, performance measures have been introduced, not as a mechanistic management tool but as a means of achieving real improvements in key areas affecting the quality of the student experience. Enrolment procedures, for instance, have been subject to a root and branch review, the outcome being a far more focused and less onerous system. The Campus Deans of Students have proved to be innovators, and good practice is freely shared. In this context, there is a concerted effort to use new technologies to assist students in managing more of their own administrative tasks. Scores have been consistently high for student support and guidance in QAA assessments, and subject reviewers have commented favourably on the role of CDSs and the work of their teams; the direct link with the university's mission of being student-centred is not lost. Finally, the system is remarkable resource efficient. It attracts approximately 6% of the university's budget, equivalent to about £200 per student per year.

At the same time, it would be misleading to claim that the system is perfect. It is still evolving, and the recent appointment of a full-time Director for Students to manage the process is evidence of a commitment to continuing change and

improvement. One current shortcoming is that although CDSs enjoy parity of status and representation with Deans of School, the former have fewer levers to enable the kind of shift that would be necessary to move from supply to demand led academic provision. This is an important restraint on the achievement of fully student centred objectives. There have also been initial problems resulting from a lack of power to influence campus estate issues; and bureaucratic tangles with some related services. Both these sets of issues have caused frustrations for CDSs, who would often like to respond quickly and positively to student requests. The flat management structure has also posed quite a challenge to the CDSs as line managers, not least because of the difficulty of making provision in the structure for a potential deputy or successor. There is also a disparity between inherited staff grading structures for administrators and the reality of a new situation in which all members of teams have to operate flexibly in sometimes highly demanding roles. Being on the front line of modern student support is certainly not a job for the fainthearted. Finally, although the CDSs as budget holders work within their allocations, there is undoubtedly a great deal more that could be done if a larger slice of the university's cake were available.

These are still early days in operating the new system. Results to date are very encouraging, although the benefits would not necessarily be replicated at other institutions. Whether directly applicable or not, it represents a particular model of student support in mass higher education. In a milieu of rapid change it is hoped that simply sharing experience in this way might be of value to us all.

Acknowledgements: This paper was originally presented in association with the following colleagues at Middlesex: Geraldine Bailey (Welfare Rights Coordinator), Susan Egert (Counselling Coordinator) and Jane Woolfenden (International Student Support Coordinator). In addition to valuable contributions from these colleagues, I am grateful for comments from Robert Crick (Director for Students) and Fiona Fall (Campus Dean of Students).

"GOING DUTCH" - Student Support Arrangements in the Netherlands.

Carol Smith, Head of Student Services, Leeds Metropolitan University

(In this article Carol Smith, Head of Student Services at Leeds Metropolitan University, shares some insights from a study visit to the Netherlands in April 2000.. The International Committee of the Association of University Administrators endorsed a visit by a group of twelve staff from ten UK Universities to investigate life at the Universities of Amsterdam and Utrecht, and the Delft Technical University. Members studied issues of governance, quality control, finance, human resource management and student support. A full report is to be published shortly by AUA).

Introduction

The starting-point for an understanding of the student experience in the Netherlands lies in an awareness of the very distinctive recruitment scenario. The process of secondary education – from age 12 – is a very much more ‘streamed’ and controlled one than in the UK. Young people are directed into particular areas of study as they mature, depending on their interests, ability or special needs, with the result that at age 18 there is a natural progression of the cohort into either one of the 14 universities, or one of the 60 or so Hogescholen. The latter provide ‘Higher Professional Education’ (Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs) similar to that formerly available (pre 1992) in the UK Polytechnic sector. The Universities concentrate on ‘academic’ teaching and research.

Of the cohort of 18 year olds reaching the end of secondary education in one of two streams, around 42% will enter University, another 41% will enter a Hogeschool and 17% will drop out. There is no entrance requirement and no selection by the HEI at this stage. Entry is automatic (except in medicine, where there is a quota system). Courses of study are normally of 4 years duration, leading to a Master’s degree in the Universities, and a Bachelor’s in the Hogescholen. The workload in both types of institution is measured in credits (studiepunten). One credit represents one week of full-time study

= 40 hours. This includes contact hours, private study and work on assignments. The student ‘working year’ is 42 weeks of full-time study = 1680 hours per year or 42 credits. A 4 year programme requires 42 x 4 credits = 168. This appears very much more intensive than under the UK credit system and is one reason why many students take much longer to achieve their degree than the theoretical 4 years. It may also be a factor contributing to the high first year attrition rate, which can be as high as 50% in some institutions. Attempts to address this include financial measures and some development of specific institutional support programmes such as the ‘Crossover Programme’ (‘Ansluitprogramma’) at Amsterdam University described below.

Despite the very controlled process by which students enter an institution, we were surprised to find that at least at Amsterdam and Utrecht, and particularly the former, an almost ‘Renaissance’ view of being a student prevailed. There was nothing equivalent to ‘level’ or ‘progression’ or even annual re-enrolment. We were informed that students enrolled on a programme of study at one institution but could then drop in, drop out and move around. There seemed to be little congruence with the UK system, even to the extent of having little in the way of disciplinary procedures to remove students, but this perhaps should not be overstated as we sampled only three universities, and this approach was described to us only in one. Nevertheless, this goes some way to explaining why the ‘perpetual student’ image seems strong in the Netherlands and is consistent with the history of the student funding process – see below. It is also almost certainly not the case in the Hogescholen which are focussed on turning out qualified professionals in four years.

Exploring the concept of ‘mature students’ was interesting. Whilst there was some acknowledgement at Utrecht and Amsterdam that there may be ‘thirty-somethings’ who would wish to have a career change, or make good previous failure, these were seen as unusual and very small in number. The whole system is geared to

maximum participation of the 18 year old cohort, and so a discussion of 'widening participation' tends to focus on how to prevent the (in UK terms small) drop-out rate at age 18. A spin-off from the current process is that the provision of childcare facilities is not an issue in Netherlands Universities; we were told that most women students will defer having children until after they have graduated – which may be any time from a minimum of 22 to 30 years of age. (This is also consistent with the success of the Netherlands in achieving low teenage pregnancy rates – there are fewer young mothers wanting to rejoin education in their 20s after having children.)

Funding Arrangements

As in the UK, the last ten years has seen some significant changes in the funding system for students, moving from a very flexible grant-aided system to one which is more loan-based and of more limited duration. Nevertheless, by UK standards, the system appears far more flexible and consistent and rewards effort and success. Its hall-mark is a broadly-based 'political' acceptance that supporting students is a three-way partnership involving the state, the student and the parents. In a detailed and very helpful presentation to us at the Ministry of Education, it was stressed that the system is for 'young people', and we were surprised that there is very little funding for the over 30's in direct terms, although tax credits are available.

Student funding has typically been made up of a combination of basic grants, additional grants (depending on parental income) and loans, covering 4 years (for grants) and typically 2 years further for loans. This has restricted the student to obtaining their qualification within 6 years and has come to be seen as unhelpfully restrictive, in the sense that with the heavy study programme, students have found it hard to fit in paid work, or take a year abroad. On the other hand, the Ministry was unwilling to increase the actual amount of financial support as it had been trying to reduce expenditure under this head; it had also had some success in a 'compact' arrangement since 1996, by which student loan funding could be converted to a grant provided certain levels of achievement were reached. In a proposal to the Second Chamber (Upper House of Parliament) in February 1999, the Minister proposed a more refined but flexible system of funding with the following elements:

- The overall level of support – through state funding, parental support, and student earned income, is aimed at the Social Security threshold for a young person.
- Students can receive up to 48 months of 'prestatie-beurs' (bursary) supplemented if they wish by a further loan, either during the same period or afterwards (up to 36 months in all). This funding can be applied for on a month-by-month basis. The 'prestatie-beurs' is initially treated as a loan.
- This package of support can be taken up during a total period of 10 years, but will cease anyway when the student reaches 30.
- Provided graduation is achieved within 10 years, the 'prestatie-beurs' will be converted to a grant (even if by then the student is 30+).
- A student who achieves at least 21 credits in their first year will have their "prestatie-beurs" converted to a grant for that year anyway and those poorer students who qualify for supplementary funding will receive it as a grant during Year One whatever happens subsequently. (This is clearly an attempt to support poorer new students and reduce attrition rates).
- The student travel pass continues to be a significant part of financial support.
- Fees (c£950 pa) are paid by all students out of their grant/loan.

These proposals were subsequently modified by the Parliament to allow a student to obtain loan finance (only), up to age 34, and with this amendment the new system comes into place for 2000 – 2001. Repayment of loans start two years after graduation for a maximum of 15 years. Remission or rescheduling of the debt is possible on low-income grounds, and it is remitted anyway if unpaid after 15 years.

The official view is that these are sound arrangements, but we found that the new approach with greater flexibility was welcomed by students and staff, largely because it enabled students to work in paid jobs and so avoid taking out loans, to which there appears to be widespread aversion. 62% of all students live at home, and 40% of Hogeschool students, 28% of University students, receive a means tested supplementary grant due to low parental income, which takes into account the need to pay fees. The monthly payment arrangements are apparently 'normal.' The prospect of monthly

loan payments to UK students would no doubt create hysteria at the Government Student Loans Company, but there are only 314,000 students in the Netherlands and only 18.7% of University students took a loan in 1996-97.

The method of funding is not based on any definition of 'full-time' or 'part-time', and while around 70% of students work, many only work around 8 hours a week. The threshold for earnings, above which the loan available is reduced, is around £5000 a year. Clearly some students will be better off working as they cannot receive total state support which would raise their income above the social security level, whereas earnings will often do so.

We found that there is nothing comparable to Access Funds in the Netherlands, but that Universities are able to use some of their general funding to ameliorate hardship, eg. by paying fees if a student is ill for a period and can neither study nor work. There is also nothing comparable to Disabled Students' Allowances and it is the responsibility of individual institutions to decide how to meet the needs of disabled students, for example, by providing dyslexia testing. Disabled students can have funding for a longer period, and there is a Central Bureau of the Ministry responsible for assisting them from secondary school onwards, but few details were available.

Personal Support

There seems to be a lower profile and less 'angst' around the meaning of 'being a student'. The pattern of support appears both more diffuse and more embedded within the whole institution than in some UK HEIs. There are typically two levels of personal support most commonly found – 'student counsellors' (= student advisers) located in all departments, and 'student psychologists' (= Counsellors) based centrally. The former are trained as generalist advisers with a focus on the students academic needs, the latter have a therapeutic role. At Utrecht there appeared to be a more complex model with study advisers in the Schools, counsellors (ie more specialist welfare advisers) working centrally, and psychologists providing some support for groups of students as well as individual therapy.* In addition Utrecht has an adviser for disabled students. Other

* With thanks to Paul Herfs for the use of his article 'Student Counselling at Utrecht University.' *Int. Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 1995-6)

central provision generally includes doctors, dentists, Chaplains (usually Christian only) and sometimes a 'vertrouwenspersoon' – a confidential adviser on issues of gender/sexuality.

It appears that the ongoing discussion about the services it is necessary to provide centrally, how they should be delivered, what else can 'Student Services' contribute to the institution, and relations with student representative bodies, is as live in the Netherlands as in the UK. A common model is the 'Service en Informatie Centrum/Studentenadviesbureau' – basically a one-stop-shop. The importance of training for staff working on reception in order to provide effective and appropriate gate-keeping and referral is well recognised as it is here. Some models include some of the 'complaints and grievances' functions often handled by a Students' Union Advice Service in the UK, and mention was made of an Ombudsman. Careers Advisory Services and advice about Accommodation also form part of the 'Information Centre' or Advice Bureau models.

'Student Services' in the Netherlands may be located within a department like 'Academic Affairs' as at Amsterdam or may be free-standing, as at Utrecht, reporting directly to a member of the Senior Management team and advising the Board on issues of student welfare. We formed the impression that at Delft, student issues were more likely to be articulated through the Student Representative Council and that whilst similar facilities existed as at Utrecht and Amsterdam, they had less input to the formal structure.

Other Aspects of Provision

Internal financial support for students from bursaries, charitable funds or endowments is as individual as in the UK. There is evidence of some financial provision for particular groups – eg. refugees, or students from a specific background. Universities are expected to bear the cost themselves of all adaptations or provision specifically to assist disabled students.

Housing provision for students only appears to be unusual. Housing for the under 27s, both students and young workers, is provided by the equivalent of Housing Associations and is particularly important for Universities like Amsterdam based in very crowded city centre sites. Utrecht has some student housing on its 'Uithof' (green-field

site on the outskirts) but it has taken over 20 years for that to be approved and constructed and with 1000 places it seemed atypical. It was considered necessary because of the pressure on rented housing in what is one of the most popular cities in the Netherlands. Whilst it is the case that many students live at home, those from less well-off families may find that space to study at home is problematic, and may try to find more appropriate accommodation within the same city. As in the UK, these students will then have the cost of rent to find and will need to work to do so.

Student participation in governance appears to be very much more effective than in the UK. Legislative changes in the sector in the '90s have reduced the degree of 'democracy' in governance but nevertheless the student voice appears to be both more articulate and actually heard. The Student Representative Councils have a formal place in governance, reporting to the Board, and the presentations made to us underlined the reality of partnership between students and academics. I was particularly struck by the mutuality of respect which clearly exists. A spin-off from these structures is a very lively and focussed student life on campus. Each department has a student organisation, which provides a focus for cultural and sporting activities, may also provide services like Student Mentoring for International Students and is funded centrally as part of a Students' Union. The welfare and advice services usually found in Students' Unions in the UK do not seem to be a feature of these organisations in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

Some of the differences and similarities in student support between the UK and the Netherlands have been covered above, but there were recurrent themes which echoed basic ongoing debates and concerns which continue to exercise us all. For example – relations between departmentally-based and centrally-based advisers; the role of 'personal tutors' or their equivalent; support for international students – particularly in the context of the requirement for proficiency in Dutch which limits recruitment except on special programmes; the concept of 'widening participation' and what it means. Looking at the 'streaming' system in Netherlands secondary education gave rise to wondering if secondary provision in the UK is not focussed enough on HE, with too low expectations in the majority of students?

All these were interesting discussions with the colleagues who were kind enough to give us their hospitality and share their experiences and ideas. We also greatly appreciated the generous amount of time which we were able to share with Dutch colleagues and the social events which they organised, especially the fish and chips and the walk on the beach at Scheveningen!

Appendix

1. Crossover Programme (‘Aansluitprogramma’) University of Amsterdam

This is a project at the University of Amsterdam for creating links with school students in 40 designated schools, with student volunteers acting as mentors and academic staff giving presentations. The aims are twofold: - to increase access to HE in schools/areas where the participation rate is low, and to help students who will go on to HE anyway make more informed choices about study programmes, to prevent drop-out.

- Student objectives:
 - Improve motivation.
 - Increase awareness of demands of University-level studies
 - Improve social skills and learning skills required at University
- University objectives:
 - Improve on-course support during “freshman” year.
 - Create a continuous study path from school – university and continuous career guidance.
 - Establish a network between school and university staff.
- Themes covered:
 - Personal development
 - Choice of profession
 - What it means to be a student in a University or polytechnic.
- Process:
 - Orientation
 - Experience on the ground
 - Evaluation
- Student mentors:
 - Screened by personal interview
 - Training/instruction manual
 - Supervision
 - Provide role model
 - Use own experiences as material
 - Personal development
- Outcomes:
 - Monitoring shows greater retention, fewer transfers
 - Higher achievement in first year.

2 Transition Year Project

This is a joint initiative of the University of Amsterdam and the Hogeschool von Amsterdam (Polytechnic) launched in 1998 – 99 and still under development. It provides an orientation year for 75 of those intending to enter HE, in either institution, and the possibility of gaining credit towards a programme of study at either. Students usually work to support themselves during this year and pay for the programme. Future possibilities are development of joint modules carrying credits for mainstream programmes at either institution, co-operation in postgraduate teaching, sharing of student residential and/or library facilities. Close co-operation is demonstrated between UvA and HvA – but this is not a merger and this degree of collaboration is apparently unusual in the sector.

CS/7/00

International Students – a Case for ‘Widening Participation’?

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In this article we explore the parallels between widening participation initiatives in HE in the UK and the way in which universities respond to international students. We suggest ways of rethinking our approach to international student support and we also consider the nature of the relationship between international students, the university and their fellow UK students.

The recent expansion of Higher Education in the UK has widened access to education for a broader range of socio-economic groups, including mature students, ethnic minorities and those on low incomes. The focus of recruitment has moved gradually away from the traditional white middle-class child of a professional family, starting university at 18 and taking a traditional academic course. Much of this change has been facilitated by the growth of the ‘new’ university sector (the old polytechnics), the extensions of vocational programmes of study and the development of access routes to support the entry of these under-represented groups. Other initiatives have also been encouraged and supported; the widening of participation in HE by disabled students is a further example of this. These changes necessitate considerable adaptation in the academic and student support systems within universities. Modes of study which facilitate access and increase recruitment such as part-time and flexible modes and distance programmes, operate alongside a modular curriculum where students can to a certain extent manage their own study. Recruiting non-traditional student groups requires a different approach with outreach and off campus activity, tasters and pre entry guidance to facilitate an informed choice. An orientation programme facilitates the transition to university and subsequent support can be met from a guidance service or by peer mentoring from other students. Learner development programmes can support study skills needs and also assist personal growth and career management.

The demand from government for universities in the UK to expand was not specifically designed to encourage access to HE or to address the issue of social inclusion of those previously excluded. It was designed to make universities self-supporting financially and to generate a work force with the technical and professional skills which employers envisioned they would require. It was not an extension of academic freedom or a policy for social engineering. It was, nevertheless an opportunity for progressively minded practitioners within some universities to develop policies to widen participation and, having done so, enhance the support systems for those students. The provision of a wide range of student services that would support non-traditional students became incorporated in the quality requirements. Furthermore, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) has put into practice the recommendation from the Dearing Report (1997) to give additional funding to universities who recruit and retain students from non-traditional backgrounds.

International students are another part of the student group which contribute to broadening the diversity of university student populations, even if part of the motivation to recruit students from outside the UK has been to increase revenue. There has been a tendency to target ‘easy’ markets and wealthy students from wealthy countries, not necessarily those whose experience would benefit their home country economically or socially. There are however, examples where universities support students from developing countries or from those suffering the disruption of civil conflict or economic collapse, using bursaries and scholarships. In a sense, this is a tradition which has its roots in a colonial past and this has contributed to the view of foreign students as a homogeneous group who need to be helped to overcome their language limitations, inadequate education and cultural incompetence – despite the fact that these are some of the most academically qualified students. Appropriate student support is therefore often based on a notion of a need for acculturation and the premise that

there is in some sense a cultural deficit in the international student (Bruch and Barty, 1998). In addition to this, the provision rarely reflects the level of fees being paid by such students.

The increases in international students have also been acknowledged and encouraged politically. In June 1999 Tony Blair announced the government's desire to see an increase of 75,000 international students studying in the UK by 2005, to be facilitated by a slackening of the regulations on part time work and changes to visa regulations (Blair, 1999). While this does make it less difficult for some students to come here, to stay and to survive financially, the impact of this policy edict has not been significant and meanwhile the Home Office gives voice to a very different message about asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom aspire to be or are studying.

Thus, universities at present remain quite cautious about the risks and costs associated with international recruitment and whereas widening participation within the UK had its champions, there does not seem to be the same ideological thrust and commitment behind the increase in international students. Teachers, administrators and students have yet to make the necessary transformations in the curriculum and their administrative systems in order to embrace a genuine celebration of the diversity which international students can bring to an academic community.

To date, the changes universities have introduced and named 'internationalisation' have tended to be superficial and there are few examples of a developed concept of International student entitlement. For example, in reality, mobility is unlikely to extend significantly beyond Europe. Many approaches to internationalising the curriculum are discreet and half-hearted – one unit or a title (Volet and Ang, 1998). Cultural awareness can often be about teaching staff how to avoid the difficulties of harassment or discrimination claims. Such activity may risk compounding racism and the tendency to stereotype rather than individualise students. There is a reluctance, and indeed a general resistance in the UK, to learn languages, and encouraging UK students to learn languages does not appear a priority. This, along with reluctance on the part of UK students to mix with international students here, can lead to the isolation of the international student (Barker et al, 1991).

Yet recent research conducted at our universities (Northumbria and Sheffield Hallam) on feedback from international students shows that the most important factor after gaining qualifications and improving spoken English, is to experience British life and culture as a normal part of life. To live among British students and learn from the experience is one of the main factors which leads to a decision to study in the UK (Thom, 1999). If we are to take on a customer focus in relation to international students in an attempt to meet their expectations then it would seem right to make an attempt to foster links between the wide variety of student and community groups through some intervention by the university via its administration, curriculum, welfare and support systems.

The concept of 'productive diversity' as promoted by Cope and Kalantzis (1997) is a useful one here. It appeals to anyone who perceives international students and international issues from a market driven approach and is likely therefore to be a successful strategy with more chance of being adopted than an idealistic one. Productive diversity is an optimistic and ingenious idea which could gain pragmatic acceptance. Cultural diversity is seen not as a problem but as an advantage and it is not about changing attitudes because it is friendly or kind, but because it is more effective. Society is diverse, the world is diverse. People are now more mobile and there are international relationships developing on a scale which we have not seen before. Universities have a duty to respond to the diversity of their student population with appropriate changes in their curriculum to reflect the nature of that population and the needs of graduates in an ever growing internationally focused and inter-cultural employment market. In such an environment, diversity of language, knowledge of other countries and cultural differences are advantages to other students and the organisations who can learn from them.

Such an approach could become a successful strategy when trying to overcome a culturally enclosed institution preoccupied with cutting costs and increasing revenue. In a university that promotes 'productive diversity' it will no longer be required that international students adapt to the dominant culture as their difference will be valued and upheld. Support for students will be for empowerment and to encourage diversity and self-

sufficiency. Students will be less likely to be grouped and assumed to be the same in their needs, approaches to learning and study. Different attitudes to knowledge and learning will be accepted and reflected in curriculum design, delivery and contact. There will no longer be the need to train staff in cross-cultural understanding as the diversity of the student population will provide opportunities to broaden and enrich their work. Any training would enable staff to recognise and take advantage of the opportunities to broaden and enrich their experience, research and teaching. International students will however still need pre-arrival information, orientation, language and academic bridging, but they will be seen, not as a special group, but as individuals who are part of the rich and diverse student body whose many different needs are anticipated and met by the institution as of right and without question. Where this is beginning to happen, the advantages to all, not least to UK students, are illustrating the positive value of having an international student community.

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Book Review – Personal Tutoring in Action

Sue Hulley, Associate Counsellor, University of Northumbria at Newcastle

Personal Tutoring in Action was first published by The University of Sheffield Counselling Service in 1994 and is now, four to five years later, in its second edition, having been revised by Colin Lago and Safina La Peta Meah. It is an updated and more comprehensive guide for tutors and not just available for staff at the University of Sheffield but also available to purchase at around £7 by other universities and colleges indeed; copies of the first edition were sold as far afield as Finland, Australia and India as well as in Europe. Whilst some of the information, such as university policy, local contact addresses and telephone numbers and internal contact names and numbers, is specific to the University of Sheffield, these are kept to a minimum so that it does provide a useful all round guide easily adapted to tutors elsewhere.

Lago and Shipton set out as the overall aims of the booklet “to offer individual staff, tutors (and others who are in supportive contact with students) some theoretical insights into the importance of communication processes...” P.4

With this in mind, the writers give practical suggestions on such skills as listening, helpful and unhelpful questioning styles and giving and receiving feedback. Further, they discuss dealing with disruptive students and difficult situations, such as breaking bad news, and they also cover mental health issues, grievance procedures, and discipline.

Lago and Shipton show how to set up the initial stages of the tutorial relationship from as early as induction and the general orientation of the student within the university. There are some examples of structured forms of introduction and guidelines for conducting individual tutorial interviews as well as working in tutorial groups. One of the strengths of the handbook is its examples of useful ideas and helpful phrases, so the tutor can immediately put the ideas into practice and see their context.

Although Lago and Shipton call the guide a “booklet” it is presented and bound as a paper back book and set out in eighteen short chapters. Whilst there are many other books on the market that give more detailed theory,

the advantage of this booklet is that it is readily accessible and easy to scan through for the specific information a tutor might need, such as delivering bad news, helpful methods of effective questioning, managing student anger and grief or working with groups.

An important feature of the tutor role is an ability to field issues effectively through referral or to deal with issues when they fall within the tutor competence. A useful feature of this book, especially for inexperienced tutors, is in its addressing the types of issues that students can bring, particularly at the beginning of their course when they are in transition and may be homesick or in culture shock. The writers look at students with particular needs, for example, those with a disability, and culturally different students, including international students. In addition, they consider mature students and how their needs and development are likely to be different from those of younger students. They also look at the effects of bereavement and stages the tutor can expect the student to go through. The advantage of highlighting these issues in this handbook is that it encourages the tutor to think about how the student can and very likely will be affected by changes in their environment, and what is an expected pattern of behaviour.

The writers also deal with the difficult question of confidentiality and whilst they mention it as an important boundary issue for tutors it might be helpful to have more detailed clear guidelines, perhaps including reference to the Data Protection Act and some useful phrases or scripts to use with students when discussing confidentiality with them.

Effective referral is essential for the benefit of the student but also to enable the tutor to have time to carry out the role of tutor Lago and Shipton use illustrations of some different types of referral taken from Wynn Bramley’s book (1) which offer helpful insights for the tutor in assessing their own referral style. Lago and Shipton look at pitfalls and boundaries of the tutoring role, such as becoming over psychological or over identifying with the student, trying to do too much or being judgmental and imposing ones own values on the students.

Also explored briefly is the issue of student retention. Research around this area, particularly by Rickinson (2) has shown that the tutor is an important feature of student early integration and students with tutors are less likely to drop out at the critical time of 4-6 weeks. This shows the value of a preventative model of tutoring rather than a problem solving model.

Always of interest in books of this nature are the vignettes or case studies, because they highlight specific examples that may be similar to ones that other tutors have experienced and can show ways of dealing with the problem more effectively. Tutors reading this book would probably like more! The writers also have a section which gives a more personal link with other tutors by including some tutor reflections on their role. They also include a sample job description to provide a stimulus for discussion.

The new edition also incorporates more information on mental health because, with a greater number of student attending university and widening access, tutors often find that they are dealing with more students experiencing mental health difficulties.

One of the changes since the book was first published has been the explosion of new technology with its expansion into the tutoring role via the use of email in this second edition the writers include some guidelines on email etiquette. Other sections that would be helpful in future would be one on profiling as a useful tool in the personal development and self evaluation of the student and a focus for tutorial work.

The book is charged at £7 (less for multiple copies) outside the university and the money is ploughed back to cover costs and profits will go eventually towards a third edition. With the advent of University charters, mission statements, performance indicators and quality audits, tutors need all the help they can get in their role of helping the student achieve success in their course and autonomy in their lives. So this handbook can provide a useful ready reference among other books on a tutor's shelf.

1. Wynn Bramley (1977) 'Personal Tutoring in Higher Education', Guildford: Society Research in Higher Education
2. Barbara Rickenson (1996) 'Systematic Monitoring of the Adjustment to University of Undergraduates: A Strategy for Reducing Withdrawal Rates.' British Journal for Guidance and Counselling, Volume 23, No. 2, p. 161

Personal Tutoring in Action by Colin Lago and Geraldine Shipton is available by contacting The Secretary, University Counselling Service, University of Sheffield, Mushroom Lane, Sheffield, S10 2TL.

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