

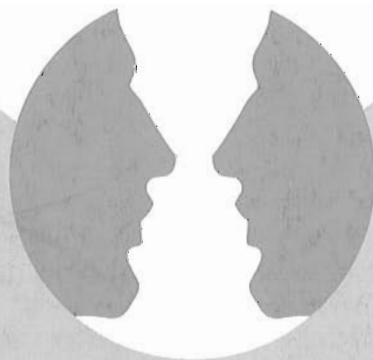
A M O S S H E

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Editorial

Quality; Development; Restructuring: these key themes in the titles of our articles in this issue reflect the current profile that now distinguishes our student services work of contributing to and enabling the student experience, and which is summed up in the title of our first article, *The Growing Importance of Student Services*.

That Student Services have moved so much closer to centre stage in higher education is a tremendous credit both to all those who work in the field now and also to those former colleagues who worked to develop the field.

June 2001 marks the 25th year of the first meeting of the group that, many years later, led the establishment of AMOSSHE. It felt right to mark this anniversary by inviting the interview with one of our leading former colleagues that constitutes our closing article in CONNECT's Spring 2001 issue.

With the warmest of thanks to our contributors,

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The Growing Importance of Student Services

Professor Peter Scott, Vice Chancellor, Kingston University

Student services are rapidly moving from the back-room to the front-office – literally so as more and more universities and colleges create one-stop-shops, drop-in centres and student help-lines. But, despite such innovations, most institutions probably still regard student services (like libraries, computing, publicity and marketing and the rest) as 'supporting' the core academic process.

My guess is that, within the next 10 years, this will all change. The hierarchical mentalities typical of an elite system will be transformed by the dynamic realities of a mass (or, as I would prefer, democratic) system.

There are two main reasons for this. The first is that a curious thing is happening to many organisations and industries. It is called 'hollowing-out'. What was once the heart of the operation – for example, the generation and distribution of electricity – is now taken (almost) for granted, while formerly peripheral activities – such as marketing or customer service – move into the mainstream. The argument is that value is no longer added exclusively by product innovation but increasingly by service enhancement.

Of course, sometimes 'hollowing-out' leads to disaster; a good example is the glitzy branding of the privatised railways which took precedence over technical reliability. But often it works. The success of Nokia as a manufacturer of mobile phones owes more to pandering to consumer fashion, and pampering its customers, than to innovation or competitive costing. Similarly gas and electricity (and water) companies now clamour to "sell" each other's products in a new transgressive post-modern market-place in which production, distribution, sales and service have been radically dis-articulated.

I am not suggesting that this model can easily be applied to universities. But there is a sense in which higher education is beginning to look old-fashioned in its continuing insistence on the "core" hegemony of what is still generally a traditional academic process (and on the primacy of academic staff as, in Harold Perkins' phrase, "the key profession"). Admittedly definitions of that process have been

widened by the new emphasis on "learning" rather than "teaching" and on technology transfer and knowledge management rather than blue-skies research. This has helped to raise the profile, and so the status, of people like librarians or student counsellors who were once rigorously subordinated as "support staff". But, when universities contemplate contracting-out services (which they loathe to do because of well-founded concerns about the need to offer both students and staff a holistic experience), it is "support services" which are threatened with out-sourcing not the academic core. You could say that, rather than being hollowed-out, universities are instead shedding their outer skins.

But it is at least worth considering more radical future scenarios. For example, in an age of e-learning, it may be much easier to buy in teaching services – whether from a lumpen academic proletariat (which is beginning to happen in further education) or a global academic elite pursuing lucrative portfolio careers. And, in an age of curricular standardisation produced by national benchmarks and tougher quality assurance regimes, the scope for academic "difference" may be substantially curtailed, leaving institutions searching for new ways to assert distinctiveness and add value. One way would be to enhance "customer care" by investing in better student services; others would include more aggressive "branding" or better "after sales" services for alumni (as potential donors or targets for continuing professional development). I am certainly not advocating such scenarios; in most respects I still cling to university traditions that emphasise holism and collegiality. But we should at least consider their potential.

My second reason for believing that student services will become more central to the mission, and operation, of universities is that the strain is beginning to show as we try to offer elite higher education to a mass student population. I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not condoning dumbing-down – still less objecting to expansion. But the increasing emphasis on quality and standards (all too rarely properly distinguished), the proliferation of performance indicators and the growth of an

intrusive (and oppressive?) "audit culture" suggest to me a fundamental loss of nerve in the emancipatory potential of a university education, a reluctance (refusal?) to come to terms with the creative heterogeneity of a mass system.

If you add to this ambivalent but deep-rooted elitism that still influences higher education leaders, and also many rank-and-file teachers, the increasing financial burden produced by the ill-judged decision to charge tuition fees and to replace grants with loans the effect is to magnify the degree of distress suffered by many students.

The combination of a highly commodified "youth culture" (by no means confined to the chronologically young) and of a high-intensity consumer society further increases the pressure on students. As a result they may now find themselves triply disadvantaged - scrutinised as potentially below academic par compared to their elite predecessors (who are doing the scrutinising!); plunged into far greater financial insecurity; yet expected, and expecting, to enjoy a life-style suitable for full members of the "me" and "now" generation.

It is student services that have to take the strain - as personal counsellors, institutional policemen, academic mediators, debt advisers - just as it may be student services that can add value in the "hollowed-out" university. The former challenge is probably easier to meet than the latter, if only because it is more familiar and so easier to comprehend. People in student services have always been used to dealing with student distress whatever form it may take - academic, financial, psychological. In doing so they have often found themselves squeezed between their loyalties to their employing institutions and their desire to help students who may well be victims of uncaring institutional policies (or uncaring national policies which institutions have no option but to implement). To a significant extent they share these dilemmas with social workers, probation officers and members of other caring professions. They are as much on the side of students as institutions - rightly so.

But the role of student services in a "hollowed-out" university could be very different, not only unfamiliar but even uncongenial. If the provision of enhanced student services becomes one way in which institutions can add value to what may be increasingly a standardised academic process,

student services could lose something of their present role as carers, advocates, even adversaries (for example, of unyielding finance departments!) and become much more tightly aligned with corporate goals. On the one hand institutions may invest more in student services, as in all "support" services, at the expense of core academic processes; on the other hand they may expect student services to stick to the institutional "line". People in student services could find themselves part of the sales and after-sales workforce. Not all the precedents are happy. I sometimes feel that organisations that trumpet their "customer focus" are often those which, in practice, short-change their customers; they hope, vainly, that such rhetoric - or should I say bull-shit? - will compensate for declining levels of real service over which "hollowed-out" organisations have little control (and about which they care little).

So, although it is fairly certain student services will become a core activity in the university of the future, even challenging the hegemony of traditional academic processes, it may not be an unmixed blessing. My first concern is that student services could be distracted from their primary responsibility not only to help students navigate their way through higher education, if necessary acting as advocates for their interests even when these come into conflict with corporate objectives. My second concern is that the two forces I identified - the potential "hollowing-out" of the university, and increasing levels of student distress - may pull student services in opposite directions.

The first, as I have said, will push student services into the corporate front-line as the primary agents of service delivery, customer responsiveness and so on. In other words their business will be to spread the "good news". The second will require student services to act even more energetically and urgently in the interests of students the quality of whose experience is being progressively undermined by a range of factors including the under-funding (and so under-staffing) of higher education, the standardisation and bureaucratisation of learning (to make external scrutiny and performance measurement simpler) and the continuing bias towards research (which, counter-intuitively, has increased rather than diminished in today's mass system). In other words, sometimes it may be their responsibility to give the "bad news".

If student services emphasise this second role, they will not always be popular with institutional leaders or politicians. There may be a concern that this potential unpopularity may restrict the flow of badly needed resources and so inhibit the development of student services. But I think it is worth taking the risk. We need to make mass higher education work - in the interests of our students and our society.

That demands honesty - maybe at times controversy and even conflict. What we do not need is people deploying their considerable professional skills to persuade us that everything is already for the best - for example, that fees have not dampened demand, that growing student debt is having no impact on their academic experience, that they actually prefer on-line learning to real teachers, and so on. If you don't believe me, look at what has happened to the railways.

Student Services: The Management of Quality

Sheila Aynsley Smith, Head of Student Services, Manchester Metropolitan University

Introduction

The question of 'quality' is of prime importance for Heads of Student Services – and indeed, for all managers. Although the most important aspect is to provide the best quality of service to our clients (students, the university and some external clients – e.g. employers, local agencies and, arguably parents), it is of equal, and potentially increasing importance, to ensure that we stand up to scrutiny under diverse quality systems.

My own interest in quality stems from my career as an administrator in the 'public sector' of higher education, starting in the exciting days of the 1970s. In the early days of polytechnics, the influence of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) was both significant and pervasive. It could be argued that, to some extent, the evolution of the Quality Assurance Agency and the range of responsibilities (and interventions) which it assumed were, at least until March of this year, approaching a reincarnation of CNAA. There were other players in the field, latterly BTEC (now Ed Excel) who operated a somewhat different and often more interventionist strategy. These early days of quality judgements tended to focus exclusively on course content and delivery; any interest in resources or ancillary support was directly concerned with the teaching/learning process. The predominant emphasis was also on initial approval, rather than ongoing systems and support strategies.

From the perspective of a manager of Student Services, in a rapidly changing environment, I will look at:

- what Quality means for us;
- current issues and developments in the provision of student support services;
- the range of systems and frameworks to which we are subject;
- management issues in ensuring a high quality service;
- addressing quality driven imperatives and requirements.

The Changing Environment

The landscape is changing rapidly, in terms of both the services which we provide and of quality

frameworks. We are all actively concerned with addressing the implications of an increasingly diverse student population (effects of widening participation and the relentless shift to mass higher education) and related financial, social and academic issues. We are responsible for providing services in an environment which places increasing emphasis on the totality of the student experience, and which views the development of personal /employability skills and experience as an intrinsic element of the learning experience.

The introductory section of the Harris Report ¹ provides an apt definition of the context in which student services now find themselves:

- the global challenge;
- changing employment and career patterns;
- expanded participation in higher education;
- changing customer relationships;
- preparing students to manage their careers;
- new and diverse learning pathways.

Added to these are other drivers such as:

- equality of opportunity;
- diversity;
- changing patterns of accountability which contribute to the rapidly changing and demanding environment in which we are trying to recruit, retain and steer our students through a significantly under resourced higher education experience.

Universities are also operating in an increasing climate of competition, to recruit students, obtain funding from diverse sources and ensure a good reputation. As with all sectors of education, we are subject to:

- numerical targets;
- system wide comparison;
- performance indicators.

Such comparators are applied to the outcomes of teaching and research, facilities and resources, applications and employment statistics. The growth

¹ Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services : Enquiry chaired by Sir Martin Harris : March 2001

in comparative data is, moreover, facilitated by reliance on ICT, on sophisticated data collection through HESA, and on other electronically transmitted information.

The management of quality, therefore, has to be set in the context of:

- a much broader definition of the aims and purpose of higher education;
- the significant growth in available and comparative data against which institutions are judged (and not always reliably).

Quality Systems and Frameworks

What do we mean by Quality?

In its literal sense, 'Quality' means a degree or standard of excellence – that is, for us, as managers, achieving a high standard of service.

However, in higher education parlance, the term has assumed a life of its own and now covers a panoply of techniques used to measure and judge (and compare) standards of provision – most typically at course level. It has also spawned a growing volume of literature. What began, essentially in the public sector, as a process of initial approval (validation) of courses and subsequent review, leading to inbuilt monitoring and evaluation, has assumed much of the vocabulary of industry of the 1980's – i.e. quality control, quality assurance etc. It now operates formally at different levels:

- institution;
- course/subject/programme;

and it is undertaken by different agencies. Embedded within both approaches, and sometimes distinct from them, but conceptually related, is the assurance of quality of support areas/departments.

Quality Systems

There is a range of quality systems to which we may be subject and of which, as managers, we must be mindful. Quality systems can be either externally imposed or internally initiated. Ideally, good practice exists where the two converge, that is, where internal systems are sufficient to satisfy external requirements; this is the basis of the QAA system of Institutional Review which "addresses the robustness and security of the systems supporting an institution's awarding function".²

² QAA Handbook for Academic Review 2001 (Introduction paragraph 4)

Current systems operate at different levels, including:

- institutional systems: these can exist at both local (departmental/service) level and through an institutional framework;
- individual service level – and we are all aware of the requirements of the AGCAS/Guidance Council Code of Practice, the new UKCOSA/OISC code of practice and BACP requirements in the Counselling area;
- sector led frameworks, exemplified through the QAA;
- other professional bodies, such as the Law Society, RIBA, Institute of Electrical Engineers, College of Speech Therapists, which accredit/approve etc course provision, but using a methodology which increasingly looks at the total student experience.

Through these different mechanisms there is a continuum which embraces self-regulation/voluntary/statutory. Formal systems operate on a periodic (5/6 year) or an annual basis – or sometimes both.

Key features of all these processes are: self evaluation; peer assessment; application of performance indicators.

Whilst such systems are intended, at least in theory, to ensure quality of provision, we are all aware that some of them bring an element of 'jumping through hoops' which is not necessarily conducive to the ultimate quality of service delivery.

Until recently, at least in the public sector, formal quality systems were essentially course driven, or focused. But this perspective is changing, with the much wider definition of the purpose and outcomes of higher education.

A Taxonomy of Systems

There are a number of ways in which student services are expected both to contribute to and comply with 'quality systems', which might be categorised as follows.

Locally-based Systems

Most departments are subject to some form of annual reporting process, whether this be to internal

management or to a formal committee. In my own institution, I produce a formal "annual operating statement" using a format which reflects the scope and priorities of the Department; contributions from individual services, using a consistent format, are an important element of that process. Some institutions have highly structured or formalised systems which involve comprehensive questionnaires, feedback and accountability loops. Virtually no service is exempt from some form of annual reporting system, although forms and channels of accountability vary considerably.

Internal (institutional) systems

All universities now have systems for internal monitoring and evaluation, quality assurance etc. These largely draw on historical roots. Most post 1992 universities will have drawn on the systems which were originally established to satisfy CNA requirements, whilst the old universities will have developed systems which have as their basis the HEQC Higher Education Quality Council and its predecessor, the Academic Audit Unit (AAU). There are significant variations in the way in which institutions address their own quality systems. Whilst some form of course-based annual monitoring and evaluation is mandatory, there is less consistency about the inclusion of support areas formally included in annual quality assurance mechanisms.

A growing number of institutions also set requirements for periodic (every 4/5 years) reviews, not only of courses, but also of support services. Again, there is variation in the formality of requirement; some are relatively informal, others borrow from course review methodology and some are highly structured and defined.

Service Level Requirements

The most high profile exemplar, currently, in this context is the imposition of AGCAS quality standards on HE careers services (although, the Harris Report recommends that (38) "the Guidance Council and AGCAS should undertake further work urgently to harmonise the AGCAS standards and the Guidance Council quality standards around a common core". Compliance with externally imposed requirements in this area seems to be inevitable. This is mirrored in the requirements for international advisers (albeit with a temporary exemption from formal compliance), is evolving in the area of counselling and is likely to emerge in the field of

disability advice and financial support (where there are already formal requirements for data return).

External Requirements

The situation in relation to the QAA process of academic review is currently highly volatile. At the time of writing, the published intentions of the QAA, as set out in the Handbook for Academic Review, are likely to be modified following a Note produced jointly by HEFCE, Universities UK and SCOP, as representing the major funding partners who contract with QAA³, introducing the concept of sampling as a basis for securing 'lightness of touch'. The area of student support has been a key feature of institutional reviews, and Student Support and Guidance is one of the core aspects of the current subject review methodology. As we move towards the new methodology which will be introduced in 2002, it is less clear how student support will be involved and this is an area to which we may need to give further thought and share experience as the new systems unfold. It is likely that, as part of subject /programme review, judgments on the quality of learning opportunities will take into account the support provided to students, particularly those with "special learning needs". The issue of student employability will also be crucial. Indeed, key questions in the QAA agenda for meeting with students are these.

- Are further study and career aspirations likely to be satisfied?
- Is there effective support and guidance for independent study?
- What skills are required, do they enhance employability?
- Do students receive effective support?

Whether the broader role of Student Services, outside the employability agenda, will be subject to scrutiny, remains to be seen.

Other Professional Bodies

Many of the professional course validation/accreditation authorities take their lead from the QAA, albeit with an appropriate time lag, and similar methodologies will apply. One of the difficulties experienced by institutions in supporting professional events is that communications and arrangements are often directly with the subject area. This can militate against effective advance planning

³ Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Delivering Lightness of Touch: HEFCE, UUK, SCOP March 2001

or preparation, with support areas being called, at the last minute, to meet visiting panels.

How Do We Manage These Processes?

As heads of Student Services, we need to consider how we:

- manage our involvement with broader frameworks and requirements;
- respond to specific/focused service requirements and exercises.

Responding to Wider Frameworks

We are all committed to supporting our colleagues in subject reviews and also to contributing to QAA institutional reviews. Under the current methodology, there is fairly consistent experience that such involvement has been valuable in fostering good working relations and indeed can provide a useful basis for joint projects, targeted delivery and enhancement of service. The extent of involvement (or intervention) varies not only between institutions but, in my experience, depends to an extent on the receptiveness of the individual subject areas. In preparing for subject review (certainly under the current QAA methodology), it is important that Student Services:

- are involved at the earliest possible opportunity;
- contribute to the draft self assessment (to become self-evaluation) document;
- are involved in the planning process;
- contribute material to the base room.

As part of current arrangements for QAA subject reviews, student services staff are normally involved in meetings with core aspect teams. It is hoped that there will still be some scope for involvement in the revised external quality process – although it may in fact be much more dependent on laying appropriate groundwork than at the sharp edge of meeting with review teams.

In order to ensure that we make an effective contribution to quality processes, either by ourselves as heads of service or those colleagues who are more directly involved in supporting students, it is important that we:

- address service quality issues on a continual basis;
- have an eye to the wider picture.

Key elements in this process are:

- establishing effective relationships with academic providers;
- ensuring a high profile of the services.

Specific mechanisms can include:

- achieving representation on relevant boards and committees – at departmental, school, faculty, and university level;
- identifying, where possible, subject/faculty representation (e.g. careers advisors);
- ensuring involvement in specific projects for instance, course based careers or disability initiatives, or collaborating in bids for funding;
- offering staff development sessions to departments/programme teams;
- organising conferences/workshops.
- issuing regular newsletters;
- maintaining up to date web pages.

This is an area where the head of service has, despite his or her personal workload, a responsibility to discharge and facilitate, using influence and networks to raise the profile of constituent services.

Specific Service Reviews

A growing number of institutions are developing formal systems for reviewing support departments. As external systems lighten, it is likely, indeed essential, that there is strong evidence of effective and comprehensive internal procedures. Institutions' own quality systems will therefore need to take a more comprehensive view of provision and QAA Codes of Practice may well be an effective driver in this context.

Any review focusing on the quality of provision will place considerable emphasis on whether clients' needs are met. Clients are both students and staff of the institution and, in many areas, external agencies. It is important, therefore, to maintain good working relationships, and to ensure collaboration in as wide an area as possible. The mechanisms suggested for interfacing with other areas of the institution would also apply in this context.

It is a matter both of good practice and pragmatism to:

- ensure that annual evaluative measures are in place. This involves effective feedback (and there is scope here for harmonization of recommended practices with institutional practices; the AGCAS guidelines have a useful draft feedback questionnaire and the

new counselling data gathering tool (Inform) are providing useful mechanisms which can be used at service level;

- demonstrate evidence of responsiveness to feedback.

If ongoing and robust measures are in place, these should be capable of satisfying any requirements, be they institutional or external; they represent, in any case, good practice. It is also clear from the new QAA methodology that those institutions which are deemed to have effective internal systems will be subject to a much lighter approach particularly in terms of subject review, and it is therefore important that such an approach embraces all areas of provision and does not focus purely on course led systems.

Key Elements of Quality at Local Level

The foregoing interpretation of quality could be perceived as purely instrumental i.e. a response to external requirements and drivers. That is an inevitable aspect of modern bureaucratic life. I appreciate that the prime concern of managers and professional staff alike, in Student Services, is the delivery of an effective quality service and that the most important clients are, inevitably, the students – and this is right. However, as managers, we have to take a pragmatic view of the environment in which we are located and to recognise that the way in which our services are perceived is important in terms of the future developments and also as contributing to the institution's own performance in the quality games.

From my own professional experience, I find that there are many refreshing aspects about managing student services. In particular, the commitment of staff within their own professional areas and, for the majority, the level of understanding and the quality of service which they provide is exemplary. Leaving aside any institutional frameworks surrounding the quality industry, there are a number of issues which we can address at local level, to facilitate and support our staff and to ensure the quality of provision and delivery. Key amongst these are:

- systematic and ongoing procedures to evaluate the quality of our services;
- effective feedback systems and evidence of responsiveness to client feedback;
- involvement in relevant institutional fora, the consultative, policy formulating, localized;

- evidence of effective systems for staff development/professional updating: This is a key element of any effective service and has to be systematically managed and monitored;
- identification and conformity to an effective and clear resource model. This has to be linked to:
 - potential for future development;
 - definition of services provided/service levels;
 - scope for operational flexibility.

We as managers also need to find ways of accessing policy-determining systems and of balancing institutional priorities with those of our services.

Conclusion

I have sought to address some of the key issues which we are facing. The majority of staff who work in Student Services are highly committed to the quality of the student experience and the quality of direct service provided is invariably high. Where there is less fluency, perhaps, is in responding to the intricacies and sometimes apparently remote requirements imposed by quality systems. This is, I believe, an area where we as managers have an important role to play and where we have to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between:

- meeting clients' needs;
- addressing professional requirements and criteria with which our own services are faced;
- supporting the university's mission and success;
- engaging in some of the more formal and arguably less grounded, but politically necessary structures and frameworks.

It is also an area in which we, as senior managers of the institution, must take a lead, carefully balancing both our institutional and service responsibilities. Continual review and scrutiny of systems may absorb that precious commodity, time, but should ultimately be of benefit both to our clients and to our working practices.

(Article based on session presented at AMOSSHE Conference in Cardiff :29 March 2001)

Student Services and Whole Person Development

Esther Yu and Anna Yeung

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the evolution of the work and philosophy of the Student Development Services of City University of Hong Kong. The Student Ambassadors Programme is cited as an example to demonstrate how it has put the concept of whole person development into practice.

2. The objectives of university education

City University of Hong Kong aims to provide quality education to its students. It aspires to prepare undergraduates to become competent professionals, exposed to a broad-based curriculum and whole person development.

During the opening ceremony of the celebration of the University's 15th Anniversary in 1999, Professor H K Chang, our President, described the ideal university graduates we look forward to produce : youngsters who are knowledgeable, virtuous, technologically well-informed, humanistic, devoted to life-long learning, committed to contribute to the well-being of the society, and are able to actualize the motto of the University "*Officium et Civitas*."**

3. The parameter of whole person development (Educating the whole person)

Our concept of whole person development combines the Five Aspects of Education found in Chinese culture, and the western philosophy of education. It encompasses the development of spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, career and emotional aspects.

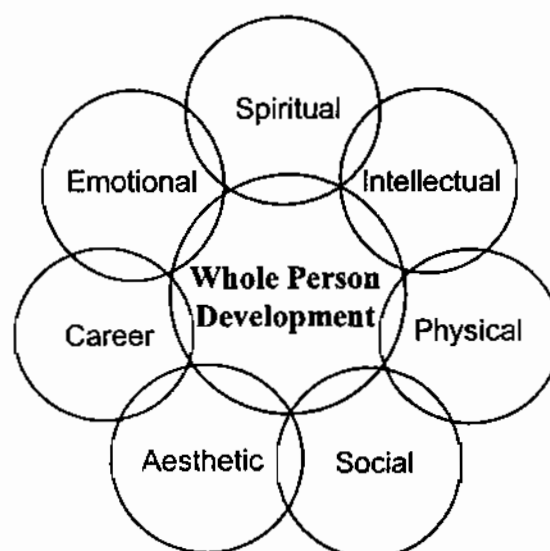
Whole person development places emphasis on the well-being of physical and mental health. Students are helped to attain achievement in their academic and personal development as well as in their careers. They will pursue life-long learning, lead a full and fruitful life and be contributive to society.(Figure 1)

** *Officium et Civitas* is the Latin translation for the motto. *Officium* captures the rich connotations of the word and denotes a high-minded sense of duty, including high office,

with a very positive moral connotation.

Civitas refers to both town/city and "Union of citizens (commonwealth)". — Calendar 2000-2001, City University of Hong Kong

Figure 1:
Whole Person Development Model



4. The philosophy and development of student services

The Student Development Services has been in place since the founding of the University in 1984. It was then called "Student Affairs Office" and was responsible for all student matters that are non-academic and non-disciplinary in nature. During all these years, the Department has been making great efforts to explore different ways to maximise the potential of the students. With the objectives of university education as the guiding principle, the Department has evolved through different stages of development.

The emphasis has moved away gradually from the offering of resources and facilities to the provision of service and welfare to students, and then to the adoption of a student-centered development approach.

There is a shift from the management and service roles to the training and educational roles.

In the early days, the Department offered resources and facilities, assuming a parenting style in the management of student affairs. Then, we broadened to take care of students' welfare and conducted all kinds of training to satisfy students' needs. In recent years, we have taken the initiative to invite our academic colleagues to work together and promote activities on whole person development. We have also managed to collaborate with the student leaders in proactively developing a positive learning culture on campus. The student leaders are expected to influence their peers in aspiring for personal excellence and in contributing to the global wellbeing.

(See figure 2, page 12)

In February 1997, the Senate of City University of Hong Kong approved the adoption of student whole person development as one of the objectives of the university. In July 1998, "Student Affairs Office" was renamed as "Student Development Services". This was a formal recognition of the effort we have been making and affirmed that we were heading for the right direction in student development.

5. The Mission of Student Development Services

The mission of Student Development Services echoes with the mission of the University: "providing quality education and whole person development". It is our aim to enrich the campus life of students and promote their whole person development. We have been working hard to create a challenging learning environment and a warm, caring, and colourful campus life. These are achieved through our diversified undertakings in promoting student development.

The Strategic Plan for 1998-2003 of our Department relates also our ambition to be the most forward-looking and best-performing office in student services among all tertiary institutions in Hong Kong and in the Asia-Pacific region.

6. Student Ambassadors Programme - Putting whole person development into practice

Since our Department has adopted student whole person development as the key objective, the educational activities, facilities and welfare that we provide are planned and organized around it — the enhancement of students' spiritual, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, career and emotional aspects.

The Student Ambassadors Programme was an innovation that first appeared in 1997. It covered the seven aspects of our educational concerns in a comprehensive way. The Programme was reviewed and enriched over the years. It can be viewed as one of our key development programmes for students in whole person development.

1. Birth - summer 1997

The University held an international conference for the Presidents of tertiary institutions and needed a large number of helpers. The Student Development Services suggested that students might assist in the reception work. We then proceeded to recruit and train 50 students as student ambassadors. The performance of these student ambassadors was highly praised by the Presidents who came from different parts of the world. The reputation of the University was enhanced and student ambassadors, too gained valuable experience.

2. Germination - 1997-98

The success of this "seed-planting" has prompted the formulation of a full-blown Student Ambassadors Programme. The University management entrusted to the Leadership and Development Team of Student Development Services the tasks of planning, recruiting, training, organizing and promoting the Programme. With sponsorship from the Quality Campus Life Fund, the training programme was enhanced from a few days to a year-long one. The academic departments of the University were also invited to recommend students to be student ambassadors. In this academic year, we had 46 student ambassadors, about half of whom were chosen to represent the University to visit Singapore. On return, they shared their observation and experience in their visit by publishing the "Reports on Singapore Interflow Tour".

3. Growth - 1998-99

The Student Ambassadors Programme was viewed as a major educational programme. High expectations and strict requirements were set when selecting the candidates for the Programme. These student ambassadors must be proficient in the English and Chinese languages, have good communication skills, positive attitude and a sense of responsibility. This year, 26 student ambassadors were recruited. The activities that they took part in had become more diversified, including liaison and reception work, course marketing and promotion activities. They also participated in social services and went to Shanghai and Hangzhou on an exchange study tour to enrich their experience and broaden their outlook. Their "Reports on Shanghai and Hangzhou Interflow Tour" received high commendation from people inside and outside the University.

4. Maturity - 1999-2000

After three years of careful nurture, the Student Ambassadors Programme started to have "shoots and leaves". The student ambassadors who graduated from the University set up their own alumni association so that they could keep their spirit alive and continue to make contribution to the University and society. The support to the programme given by the University management and the academic staff of the various departments, as well as the student ambassadors' demonstration of life-long learning and service, have created a mark in enriching campus life and enhancing the learning culture. Above all, the programme ensures that participants advance in their whole person development.

(see Figure 3, page 13)

7. Conclusion

The Student Development Services has assumed a student-centred approach, attaching new meaning to the work and strategies of student services. It is proactive and forward-looking, aiming at the whole person development of students.

Being educationalists, we have put a lot of efforts into collaborating with the academic staff and student leaders so that students are

motivated to learn, develop their potential and achieve all-round development. The Student Ambassadors Programme has been an example of success.

We are of the view that helping students to attain whole person development is not just the responsibility of Student Development Services. All the academic staff and colleagues in other units (such as the Library or Computing Services Centre) can help to cultivate a "seamless" quality learning culture on campus through their contact with students. The co-operation of the academic staff in the venture has positive effects in instilling among students a sense of responsibility and identity with the University. Outstanding student leaders, too, are powerful catalysts in creating a positive influence on their peer groups.

Figure 2 General Objectives for Student Services Work

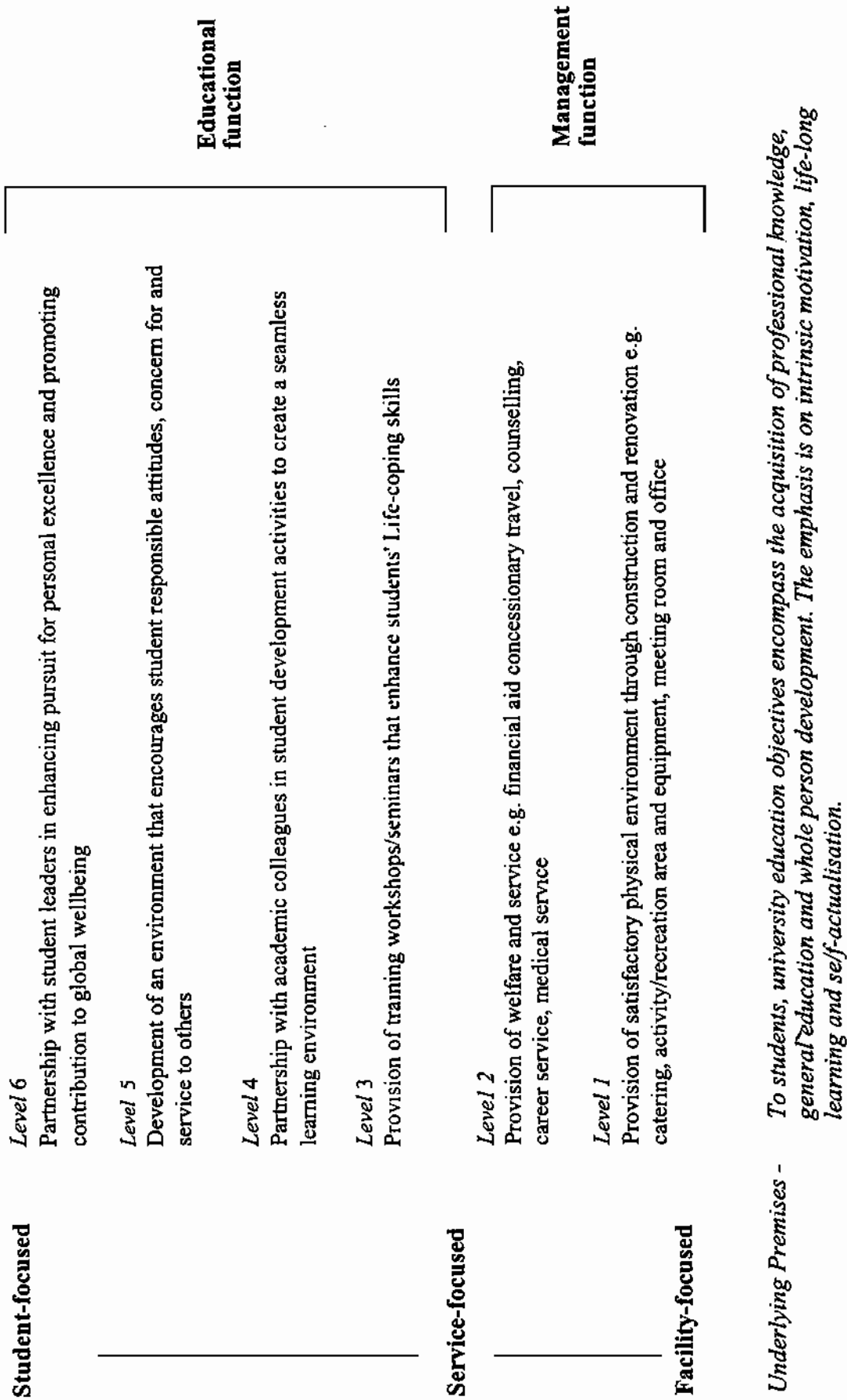
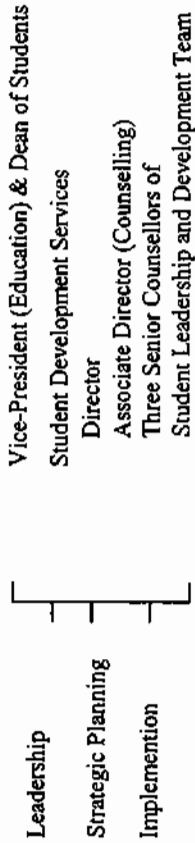
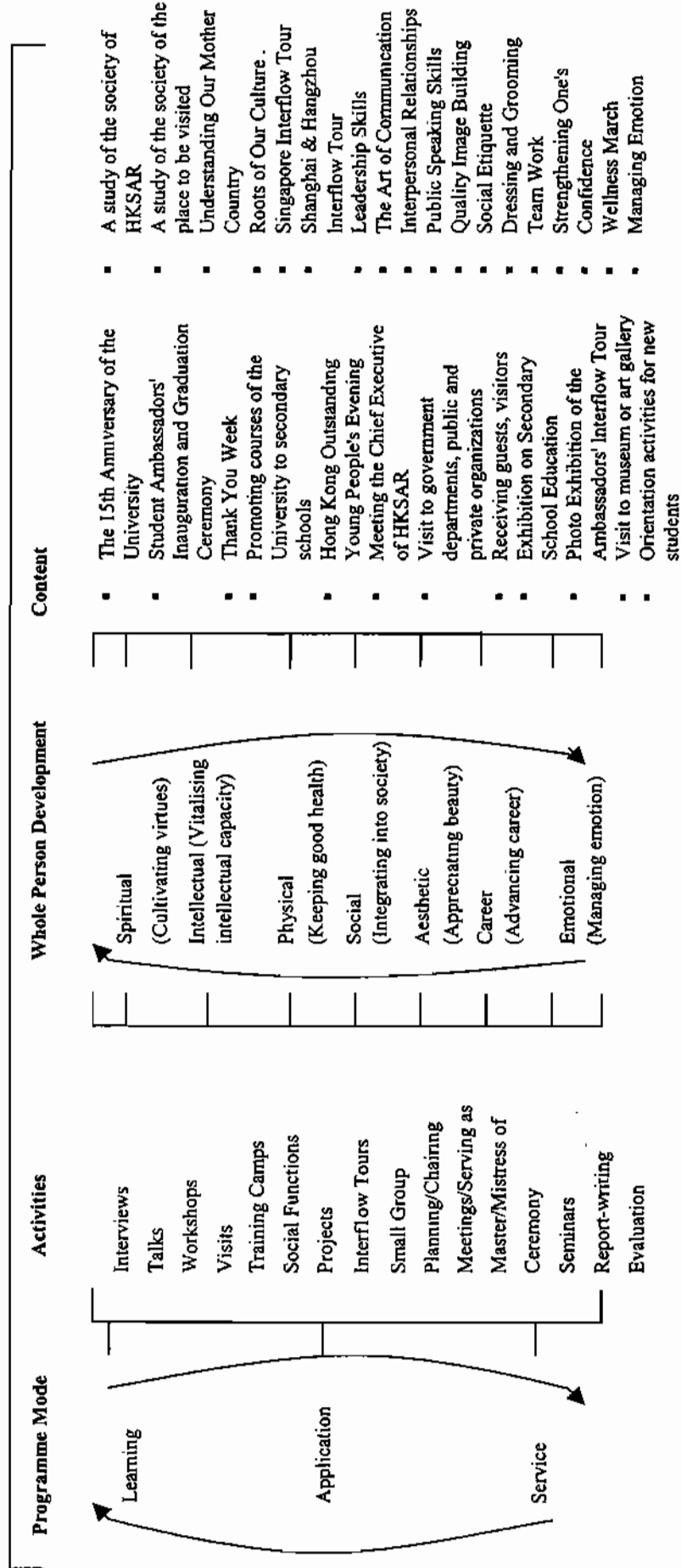


Figure 3 Student Ambassadors Programme - Putting Whole Person Development into Practice



Student Ambassadors Programme

It aims to provide training to students with potential so that they can attain a balanced whole person development through various kinds of learning, application and service. The ambassadors are expected to be concerned about our country, take interest in world issues, contribute to the building of a better Hong Kong and enhance the images of the University and Hong Kong.



The Restructuring of A University Health Service

Sandra Furnston, Health Advisory Service Co-ordinator, Middlesex University

Middlesex University is a multi campus university straddling large areas of north London. In the early 1990s six nurses working on the larger campuses provided the student health service. These personnel provided a 'drop in' consultation service offering advice, treatment for minor illness and injury and in some cases occupational screening. Links were forged with local GP practices, and some of the doctors would visit the university once or twice a week to hold surgeries.

During the next decade higher education establishments suffered stringent financial restraints and this service was seen as somewhat of a luxury, duplicating a service already available in the community. Staff lost by 'natural wastage' were not replaced, and in 1997 two full time and one part time member of staff were all that remained of the student health service. This time coincided with a major re-structuring of the University management structure and the service was evaluated and reassessed to look at providing the most efficient service for students within the institution. It was thought that offering a treatment and first-aid service was no longer viable or, indeed, the most productive use of professional time and that we should be looking at utilizing our skills in a more pro-active way in providing a health education and promotion service, empowering students to take care of and responsibility for, their own health and well being. To this end, the new Health Advisory Service was established in 1997, staffed by one full time coordinator and two staff working part-time, term time only contracts. During the next few years one of the part time staff retired and was not replaced, so the service is now staffed by one full-time member and one member working 20 hours a week.

The present staffing levels have had an enormous effect on the kind of service that we can offer to students. One to one advice is made available, but clearly, given the geographical spread of the University, the number of students (25000) and staff numbers, then telephone and email communication are the most realistic methods. This

still provides a well-used service, 1583 consultations were logged in the last academic year.

If a student wishes to consult a health adviser personally then an appointment is made at a convenient location. At present a website is being developed. This should provide information and answers to most frequently asked questions.

The remit of the service is primarily student health care but also to function in an institutional role, working and advising on relevant policy matters. A comprehensive policy on managing meningitis has been produced in the last year. A working party has just been formed to produce protocols and guidelines on mental health and HIV.

Also, the Occupational Health policies are due for review this year. Strong links have been forged with local community health services, including general practices, communicable disease specialists and local drugs advisory teams. This ensures easy access and good communication between the University and these services where necessary.

The main aim of the new service is to empower students to take the responsibility for the care of their own health. This has not always been an easy conversion. A student 'coming to the nurse for a pill for a head ache' is not always appreciative when it is explained that they should perhaps carry paracetamol for such an eventuality (whilst of course asking the relevant questions to ensure it is not a more serious complaint.)

As new students come into the University it has been important to explain the function of the health Advisory Service at induction programmes. The most frequently asked question is 'What do we do in the case of accident?'. The university does of course have a full complement of first-aiders. One of the first tasks in the new regime was to work closely with the Health and Safety Officer to improve methods of contacting First-aiders.

Providing a health promotion programme in an institution of this size is a marathon task. To make a reasonable impact, we felt, would be beyond the capabilities of the two (1.5 FTE) staff in the service. At the time that these changes were taking place there was an initiative at several other universities to put health promotion on the agenda and designate the institutions as Health Promoting Universities in the style of 'healthy cities', an initiative endorsed by the World Health Organisation. Within Middlesex, this initiative was picked up by a Principal Lecturer in Health Promotion, a meeting was arranged between her, the Health and Safety Officer and myself.

As a result of this meeting, it was decided that we would attempt to go down the road of the Health Promoting University Initiative. The three original members of the group had a brainstorming session, looking at likely interested participants and eventually representatives from a variety of disciplines within the university were invited to join the group. The primary group was made up of representatives from the following university departments: - Health Advice, Academic staff (Health Promotion) Health and Safety, the Healthy Living project, Sports and Leisure, Catering, Student Union and the Counselling Service. This group forming the alliance that was to become the Health Promoting University Steering Group.

It was decided that, in order to give the project some gravitas and to establish its existence within the university structures, it should be presented to the University Executive for their sanction. It was also hoped that this might prompt some funding. The preferred route for this was through the University Health and Safety Committee and to this end a paper was prepared and presented to this committee in Jan 1999. The paper was composed of the background, aims and a proposal for the way forward, along with suggested budgetary requirements and ideas for projects within a Health Promoting University. The proposal was received with interest and a degree of approval although some members had reservations. It was made clear that no funding would be forthcoming at this stage, but we were encouraged to continue the initiative and to report back in the future.

The group's next step was to audit the existing activities within the university that would fall under

the umbrella of a Health Promoting University. Having done this we set out to plan a programme of events through out the academic year. A second paper was presented to the Health and Safety Committee, this time received with more enthusiasm and a suggestion to return in the future with a calendar of events for the coming year.

A calendar was formulated built around the framework of national initiatives such as World Aids Day and National No Smoking Day, but incorporating local needs such as raising awareness around meningitis and encouraging students to register with local GPs. It also has enough flexibility to allow us to react to local or national issues if necessary. The calendar was published on the Health Advisory Service publicity, which ensures wide distribution around the university.

Since the alliance was set up the group have produced a regular programme of health events across the seven main campuses of the university. The 2000-2001 calendar addresses twelve events. These will vary in size from the stall-based event where an information stall is provided on every campus, to larger events spanning a week where we arrange subject-based seminars, set up videos and appropriate films and offer participatory games and competitions on the stalls. European Week for Health and Safety was announced after the calendar was printed but we incorporated it in our programme as an extra initiative, with poster displays, manual handling courses and back care exercise regimes provided by the sports and recreation department.

All members of the steering group and the staff they represent contribute to all events, but on specific issues some groups will take the lead, for example the Counselling Service will be main players for the Mental Health Week. The Student Union Welfare Officer is an enthusiastic member of the group so all activities have full student union participation.

The creation of this alliance has enabled the Health Advisory Service to fulfill its remit to provide a programme of health promotion and facilitated useful collaborative work between various disciplines within the university. The local links ensure that the alliance can also draw on external resources and expertise. Most aspects of health

promotion are now addressed from numerous perspectives, some of them very innovative. The catering outlet has provided menus for mental health; health promotion students have given out healthy juices. During the week of World AIDS Day 2000 Middlesex University launched itself as a Health Promoting University.

In conclusion, we feel that, following the restructuring exercise the University has gained a proactive service providing health advice and education on a university wide level. and that students can benefit from a regular schedule of health promotions. A small service has succeeded in turning itself around to reach out to most corners of the University.

25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Association of Heads of Polytechnic Student Services (AHOPSS): *An Interview with George Buckton, formerly Chair of AHOPSS and Head of Student Services at Plymouth Polytechnic, and with an Introductory Note by John Rolfe, Director of Student Services at the University of Northumbria*

Introductory Note

June 2001 marks the 25th anniversary of the first meeting of the Group who established the Association of Heads of Polytechnic Student Services (AHOPSS).

On 25 June 1976 twelve Heads of Student Services arranged to meet at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, though two had to send apologies. In November, Oxford Polytechnic hosted the second meeting - which I attended.

Much of the first few meetings was taken up with getting the Group going, establishing its purpose and terms of reference, agreeing a Constitution and deciding what Officers were needed. The Group became an Association when the Constitution was adopted at the third meeting, at Hatfield, in March 1977. Officers - Chair and Secretary - were elected at the fourth meeting, held at Bristol.

From February 1980, this inward-looking kind of business was kept within the confines of a 'business session', and from then on the Association could be more outward-looking, and in its General Meeting sessions, addressed a wide range of issues, many of which strike a familiar note:

Discontinuing Students	February 1980
Student Accommodation	February 1981
Students with Disabilities	ditto
Student Induction	June 1981
Support with Examinations	November 1981
Personal Tutoring	February 1982
Continuing Education	June 1983
International Student Support	February 1984
Student Health Services	June 1984
Student Finance	November 1984
IT and Student Services	February 1985
Marketing Student Services	ditto

Three meetings were held each year, in November, February (though bad experience with weather moved that one to March) and June/July.

An annual subscription - £5 - was introduced at the June 1982 meeting, and the new office of Vice-Chair was introduced to support the Chair and to handle the financial business (the office of Treasurer was to come later).

The June 1982 meeting, the first two-day event, saw the start of the annual residential summer meetings.

Keith Hammond of Wolverhampton Polytechnic, Frances Higgins of Preston, Jean Williams of Portsmouth, Susan Walter of City of London, Helen Stubbs of Brighton, Tony Tucker of Oxford, Clive Constance of Hatfield, Albert Preston of North East London, Peter Barnwell of Huddersfield, and Bryan Thornhill of North Staffordshire, were among the early leaders of AHOPSS.

So also was George Buckton of Plymouth. George led the development of the relationship with the Council for National Academic Awards. It was to support this development that the Association produced the Booklet "The Role of Student Services". George says more about these in the interview he kindly did with me, a transcript of which forms the main part of this article and appears below.

Sixteen years after the first meeting, the removal of UK Higher Education's binary line between Polytechnics and Universities, meant that the 'P' needed to be taken out of AHOPSS. So AHOPSS changed and became the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE), and its membership, now drawn from both sides of where the line had been, expanded.

John Rolfe

Telephone Interview with George Buckton (John Rolfe's Questions shown in Italics)

George, what do you think brought about in the early 1970s the approach to Student Services, particularly in the Polytechnics, of linking or integrating the various services for students in Higher Education institutions?

Firstly, may I say how nice it is to be reminded of a worthwhile, yet demanding, time of my life. The pleasures were accentuated by meeting with colleagues and sharing concerns and experiences. You and I, John, must have spent many hours discussing various issues, mostly student-based, but sometimes drifting to my native Tyneside of which you were a learned representative!

Now, to answer your question, the early approach was mainly due, I feel, to one or two enlightened Directors (Vice-Chancellors, as we would now call them) and Deputy Directors of Polytechnics. Some polytechnics recognised the educational rationale of Student Services and saw that there was good sense – including economic sense – in taking a comprehensive, rather than a bits and pieces, approach.

In my own case, I was indebted to my institution's recognition that some kind of service was required and being given a degree of autonomy regarding its model and framework.

How did AHOPSS – The Association of Heads of Polytechnic Student Services – all begin and what factors prompted its development?

I think that there are a number of factors. Some of us felt a little isolated in our management roles. As individuals, we had a particular need to identify

what to develop and how to develop. We did this through discussion with colleagues who had different ideas, and different approaches and came from diverse backgrounds.. Nevertheless we seemed to have a common denominator, and that common denominator, as far as I can see from reading articles in CONNECT, is still the same one: the needs of students. What highlighted early debates was the diverse backgrounds of the 'Heads'. Those of us with a counsellor/teacher/educational background did not divorce a counselling approach from educational issues. We viewed things from a broad educational perspective so that 'services' supported academic courses and colleagues. In other words we were asking, "What do students need in addition to the academic content of their course?"

In this way, we began to review accommodation, halls of residence, welfare and other 'student service' matters. Management, economic factors, responsibilities and accountability were all key words in our discussions throughout the late 1970s and 1980s.

From CONNECT articles you kindly sent to me, I realise that things have moved on. 'Student finance', which was not in my remit, is now very prevalent. I feel for students who are going to leave their studies in debt, of anything up to £10,000 – a frightening prospect.

Then there was the influence of, and our concerns about, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), which, I suppose, has some equivalent in today's Quality Assessment Agency. Many of us were dissatisfied with CNAA's viewing of Student

Services and detected a lack of understanding about our philosophy and purpose (and its importance in supporting academic aspirations). Hence, a group of us visited CNAAs offices, and offered some training to permanent officers. As a result of this, questioning at, and of, institutions was more enlightened, and the role of Student Services better recognised. An important development, as you will remember as an avid contributor, John, was the booklet we published in 1985, 'The Role of Student Services' – a consequence of our CNAAs contact.

I wonder whether the QAA has a similar kind of brief these days. I would be very interested to find out whether the panels who come to look at various subject areas know what to look for in terms of support mechanisms. My impression is that nowadays, institutions and subject panels do have more of an understanding of the needs of students. The professional bodies, such as AGCAS and AUCC, have also contributed to the development of this understanding. I would hope that institutions and academic colleagues came to accept the need for at least some of the support provisions, such as good counselling and careers services. However, it may have been less obvious what help there was for, say, study skills, or learning development, at that time.

Perhaps the need for support with study skills is now more generally accepted and developed than was the case a few years ago. In developing Student Services at Northumbria, I have tried to place the emphasis on mainstreaming student services in supporting students' learning and supporting the student experience. The litmus test I use for whether we should be doing something or not is: Does it help students learn?

That is the key question at the end of the day. However, looking back to the time when I retired 10 years ago, there was huge concern about the rise in percentage of 'mature' students in the general student population, and the consequent need for a good deal of assistance with learning development.

Do you feel that there were particular skills that you required as a Head of Student Services and which have helped you in the things which you have been asked to do since you retired?

It taught me to be very thick-skinned, and to be diplomatic!! But the most important thing I learned was management skills. It was always difficult,

with so many diverse components, for which one was responsible, to see that everybody was getting what they felt was necessary. You had to juggle with the overall view of what the needs of students were at a particular moment. There were some groups that needed more support than others. This all had to be done within a resource structure that wasn't always very well defined – though I am sure we all felt then, as we all feel now, that we could do with more resources. I wonder if this strikes a chord with your current members.

Being Head of Student Services also helped me to recognise the diverse nature of student needs. In my opinion the only way to identify needs was to talk with your students. I quite deliberately had members of the Students Union involved in our programme. Many AHOPSS colleagues, on their visit to Plymouth, were impressed by the responses that they gave, because they worked very closely with us. I felt that was always an asset as long as the process did not become political. Indeed, I am still in contact with a number of former Student Union Presidents. I hear from them quite regularly. I think I learnt a lot from them, but they seemed to pick up a great deal from me. This perhaps tempered some of their political outcries and helped them to learn and approach issues in a slightly more perceptive way.

Since my retirement my counselling and consultancy work has been based on a similar base or framework of dialogue, perceived needs and involvement.

What helped that relationship to be as good as it was?

Talking with and involving the students: as simple as that. Being able to sit down and say: "Look this is what I am doing; this is why I am doing it; I am not looking at it from a political angle, I am looking at it from the real needs of students". My colleagues and I used to put aside a morning or an afternoon when we would meet with students. That was the greatest part of our learning to work together. However, regarding larger scale student affairs forums or committees, it would be a fair debating point as to whether these were helpful then, or indeed, whether they might be helpful today. My own experience was that I found them helpful at that time, even if it was just from the point of view of communicating things that were happening, internal and external to the institution.

At Newcastle Polytechnic (now Northumbria University) our experience was that the Staff and Student Consultative Committee - as we called our student affairs committee - was very valuable through the 1970s and until about the mid-1980s. Indeed, most of the provisions for students here, whether the Students Union or the halls of residence or the other services for students, were set up by that committee. Then, by about the late 1980s, perhaps it had done its work. Anyway, it ran out of steam and it became increasingly difficult to engage student involvement in the work of this committee.

Maybe you have latched on to a point that I may now find very different. There don't seem to be as many students wanting to be involved in the institution. I fancy that many of them are having to work in the evenings in order to survive and so they don't have the time for participation in the institution that they once did. I recognise that the local McDonalds in Plymouth is staffed almost entirely by students. It is a necessity of the day, it seems.

Another change is the increased proportion of mature students and they are not going to have time to take part in activities within the college - and I am thinking in particular of one-parent families.

Regarding your role as Head of Student Services, do you feel that the senior management or the institution understood your role as Head of Student Services in the way that you understood it, or would there have been a difference of perception?

So far in our discussion, we seem to have accentuated our link with students, but there was a communication exercise going on at the same time with staff, and I think that was equally important. I felt very proud that at one stage 117 of our 450 academic staff had come forward for counselling skills training. That allowed us to talk with academic staff about student difficulties and concerns, and what we were doing within our respective roles. Whether the head of the institution and the Deans and Heads of Faculty were equally well versed, depended on the individual as well as on good communication. It also depended on whether they recognised the value of the services which, in turn, may have been related to their own personal educational values. However, by the late 1980s, limitations on resources made it feel that we were just hanging on to things rather than having

any sense of developing our services. Perhaps this is the point where accountants took over education! Or so it seemed!!

In a nutshell, what was your perception of your role as Head of Student Services?

I felt that I was holding together a unit made up of a number of components: integrated, and working well together in order to meet the needs of students. There was an economic recognition that, by working together, we probably saved money: the efficiency factor. There was also a recognition of the many links between what each of us was doing. There were then, and I am sure there are now, many links between all our functional areas - e.g., between accommodation and welfare, and counselling.

Through whatever contact with students and by recognising each of our specialisms, we hoped to enable good referral. That was the umbrella model as I saw it. Whether everybody saw it this way, I am not sure. My philosophy was based on the premise that the student services staff should recognise each others' skills, develop their own, and know when to refer to each other appropriately.

Could you say something about what you found fulfilling or enjoyable about being a Head of Student Services.

I am going to take the words of a colleague with whom I was working recently. He admitted that there were tears in his eyes when, at a graduation ceremony, he saw one or two of his students going up for their degrees, and he recognised what they had gone through, the concerns that they had had, and the struggles that they had overcome. I think that is where we found our fulfilment and rewards. There were successes, even though there were some failures - though I have never considered a student, who has left an institution for the right reasons, to be a failure.

Currently, I am privileged to provide counselling supervision to Student Counsellors in a Plymouth College. I hear casework based on struggle, of anxieties and depression, and so on. I am sure, John, that as a Student Counsellor, you have heard it all. But the fulfilment comes in the successes, and of the personal development which is evident. Those who have offered financial, study or vocational help must feel equally rewarded. It is

not always recognised, even now, the valuable contribution which Student Services make in the progress, development and success of students, however, I am pleased to note that many students value the assistance they are given outside the academic mainstream.

If one of them were to ask you about your successes, what would you say?

I would come back to the fact that, as a result of our work, students did achieve. Many of them would have dropped by the wayside, if they hadn't had our services. I hope it doesn't sound arrogant, John, but I still think that the model and philosophy we adopted long ago, was appropriate and proved its successfulness. Naturally, we relied on the right calibre of staff, in the various components, to support that approach of team work and professionalism. I would be surprised if modern approaches differ substantially, even though pressures must be great in terms of resources (or lack of them)!

In a sense, my own personal development has continued since my so-called retirement. I have provided numerous consultancies in education and for organisations. I continue to provide some counselling, as well as counselling supervision. As a trustee of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Member of its Professional Committee and Chair of its Appeals Board, I have a national interest and was recently awarded a Fellowship of the BACP. If you see these as successes, then I owe my learning to a great extent to the work I did in the umbrella-holding exercise I have described as Student Services.

What suggestions might you offer to someone starting off as a head or manager of student services?

I would not really want to be so presumptuous as to know all the answers. But perhaps I would suggest that they encourage their colleagues to see the needs of students as they are seen by the students themselves, and by the staff, and to talk with students and staff so as to discern where these needs can be met and how. Some of them may not be ideally met within student services. I would also suggest becoming involved in student finance, because that is very much a part of student affairs in a college now. I would also point to the importance of widening access and participation. A further

suggestion – and I keep coming back to talking to students and staff – is just simply to sit down with groups of students and groups of staff and try to work out ways of responding to, or backing up, the educational needs of students. They can vary from institution to institution.

Also, it is important that the different elements of student services respect each other – this is not always a very conspicuous feature of student services. I notice that there can still be a tendency for people to operate behind the walls of “me as a careers adviser” or “me as a counsellor”. I would want the careers adviser to know what the counsellor does, as well as why, how and when it might be appropriate to refer. I would love to sit down with colleagues in different services, in front of a whiteboard, to talk together about where their skills overlap, and what they have in common. I would like to think that we would begin to try to respond to the needs of students in a more concerted, comprehensive way.

Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to say, reflecting on AHOPSS in its early days?

I recognise that there was tremendous camaraderie. If I felt the need either to sound off or to ask questions, I could pick up the telephone and talk to one of my AHOPSS colleagues and discuss a difficulty. I think one of the things I found very difficult in an academic institution was to formulate a support network within it. In student services we sometimes found ourselves to be out on a limb and isolated – in Plymouth's case, not just geographically isolated but isolated within the institution. Certainly this was how it felt in Plymouth, and I can recall in those early days how important and morale raising it was to know that, for example, I could talk to you and/or others by telephone, and share a concern – sometimes trivial, sometimes major.

I would like to think that the AHOPSS spirit has projected itself into AMOSSHE. In a further telephone call perhaps you can let me know what you think!

George, thank you very much.

It really has been good recalling early days.

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