Journal of Student Services in Higher Education

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The Journal of the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE)

Volume 1

Summer 2005

The Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE)

AMOSSHE brings together those who have responsibility for the management or co-ordination of a wide range of learner support and guidance services for students in higher education. AMOSSHE is a membership organisation committed to informing and supporting the leaders of student services and representing, advocating for, and promoting the student experience.

The ***Journal of Student Services in Higher Education*** – the AMOSSHE journal – is published annually and distributed free to all full members of the Association.

The *Journal* is also available to non-members. For further information about membership of AMOSSHE, subscriptions to the Journal, purchase of individual copies, or copies in alternative formats, please contact the National Office:

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Editorial

I am very pleased to be introducing the first edition of AMOSSHE's new journal, the *Journal of Student Services in Higher Education*. AMOSSHE, the Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education, is now clearly established as the key voice for UK student services, with a membership that is drawn from the vast majority of higher education institutions across the UK; these range from very large city centre institutions and campus universities to small specialist colleges. AMOSSHE members are responsible for the development and delivery of a very wide range of services designed to support students' learning and add value to their learning experience; we hope that this journal will make an important contribution to supporting the membership and developing AMOSSHE's role by providing opportunities for debate and the sharing of insights and experiences with a wide audience.

The format of this first volume sets the pattern for future editions. The Journal's editors are hoping to publish a wide range of contributions, including relatively substantial analytical and discursive articles and shorter contributions outlining innovative approaches and responses to issues of broad relevance. The subject matter can be very broad, as long as it has relevance to AMOSSHE members and the students and institutions that they serve: the issues addressed in this volume, for example, cover disability, quality assurance, orientation and pre-entry guidance. Also included are reports on the results of the last AMOSSHE membership survey and the most recent NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, a US-based organisation) exchange visit. There is also a conference report; we hope that such reports will become a regular feature of the journal, providing a mechanism for wider dissemination of the key findings and debates that emerge from the increasing number of conferences held nationally, and internationally, on student affairs.

We also intend in the future to include book reviews, and we are currently contacting publishers to encourage them to send review copies of relevant publications. We should like to encourage contributions to the Journal from both those who work within student services and also those responsible for developing and implementing HE policy at local and national levels, including those working in other countries.

The AMOSSHE Executive Committee and the editorial board would particularly like to thank those who have contributed to this first volume for taking the time to write for the Journal and for their patience in waiting so long to see their words in print. For the future, we expect to have a streamlined process in place, with publication more rapidly following the acceptance of contributions. The greatest debt of gratitude must however be to the Journal's predecessor, *Connect* and its editors and contributors, and in particular to John Rolfe, without whose vision, skills and persistence in producing its eight volumes, there may never have been an AMOSSHE journal at all.

Annie Grant, on behalf of the AMOSSHE Executive Committee
July 2005

The DDA and the Widening Participation Initiative: a Challenge to Central and Residential Services or an Opportunity to Develop Existing Good Practice?

David Owens and Claire Powrie

Identifying what can be achieved

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is frequently described as presenting a challenge to staff in Higher Education, and for some, not too welcome a challenge at that. However, this attitude potentially undermines the extensive work that has already been undertaken in most, if not all, institutions and the desire to improve services that has driven this work prior to any legal obligation to do so. It is all too easy to focus on the costs of adaptations and modifications to buildings, when in reality the majority of students with a mobility difficulty or visual impairment have found ways of circumnavigating the institution even if the routes used are admittedly not always the most direct or convenient. Clearly work in this area does need to be identified and prioritised but should not dominate the agenda, to the detriment of other initiatives.

What the Act encourages institutions to do is to review and develop current good practice to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all students. This task is in harmony with the ambitions of all institutions given the commitment to equality of opportunity within the sector. However discussion has arisen over the section of the Act which requires institutions to make reasonable and anticipatory adjustments, with the caveat that what is reasonable will depend on all the individual circumstances of the case, including:

- the importance of the service
- the financial resources of the institution
- the practicality of the adjustment
- the need to maintain academic standards
- the relevant interests of other people including other students.

This has introduced an unhelpful degree of confusion and appears in some cases to have become a stumbling block rather than stimulating creative approaches to the implementation of the Act, little helped by the failure of the Act to define statements such as 'the importance of the service'. The debate on what is reasonable has been further fuelled by the lack of any indication in the Act as to what base line provision should be, despite guidance published by HEFCE (1999) on base-level provision. Given this situation the question is, what action should central and residential services be taking.

What constitutes central services and what is required of these services?

The simple answer is that central services are those provided across the university rather than by individual departments; they include marketing and publicity, academic registry, time-tabling, room booking services, advisory services (including counselling, careers, health, welfare and so forth; see also Grant in this volume) and the Students' Union.

The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled applicants, potential applicants and students. This means that an institution's obligation starts before a student has decided to make a specific application, with marketing and publicity materials, and recruitment activities. As a minimum, the prospectus, detailed departmental information and any advertising campaigns need to be accessible and available in alternative formats. Web-based materials need to be accessible to those using assistive technology, meeting current best practice in respect of accessibility (for example, WC3 2004) and, most importantly, regularly updated to reflect current levels of provision; this is something that the prospectus, produced so far in advance of the academic year it describes, cannot always do. All the information should clearly state what adjustments are already in place and what additional adjustments can be made on an individual basis. Staff responding to phone calls or e-mails from potential applicants should be trained to respond fully to all enquiries or be able to refer them to the appropriate specialist staff.

Staff involved in recruitment and selection should be aware of the provision in place and be able to provide accurate information to potential students, including availability of course notes prior to lectures and any individual exam arrangements or alternative methods of assessment.

It does not stop there, however, as the Act also requires that institutions make anticipatory adjustments. Many institutions employ students to talk to prospective applicants and take them on campus tours on open days. It is not unreasonable that the routes chosen for those tours should be accessible for someone with a visual or mobility impairment and specially adapted rooms should be shown as part of a selection of accommodation available to students. This should be included automatically to demonstrate the institution's commitment to inclusion. Students acting as guides should also be aware of the provision in place for students with a disability and refer to these when talking about the services and facilities provided by the institution, regardless of whether or not someone who has disclosed a disability is on the tour.

At all stages, from enquiry to acceptance, students should be given every opportunity to declare a disability. Literature should invite and encourage students to inform the institution, along with an explanation as to why this information is being sought and how it will be treated. All staff, including students employed as tour guides on open days, should be aware of how to respond to a student who discloses a disability and know to whom, with the students consent, information should be passed. There should also be further opportunity for a student to disclose at registration.

In many institutions thought needs to be given to the registration process, which can be protracted with students having to queue at a number of different points to complete the various stages. It is important to ensure that this activity is undertaken in buildings that are accessible, ideally with level access and good clear signage. Staff should be trained to recognise and assist students who are experiencing difficulty in completing forms (this assists not only students with dyslexia but also international students who may still be disorientated after a long flight and the attempt to adapt to an unfamiliar system). A specific registration time should be offered to someone who experiences fatigue or who is unable to stand in queues for long periods.

A model of good practice exists in some institutions in New Zealand where queue-jumping cards are issued to eligible students, enabling them to move to the front of the queue. However, some students may find it a little daunting to do this, and staff would need to ask those holding cards to come forward.

Time-tabling and room booking services should be advised of the needs of students who have declared a disability so that they can ensure that the most accessible rooms are made available, wherever possible. A wheelchair user may require a working surface to be higher than standard, and if height adjustable tables are not provided, blocks should be available to raise desks or tables. Students with a hearing impairment should be allocated rooms with a hearing loop or, where appropriate, staff should be issued with a radio mike or other equipment to aid communication.

All staff should be trained to communicate effectively with someone who lip reads or has communication difficulties, and should be encouraged to discuss with the student their individual needs and requirements. They should check with the student, outside the lecture, that adjustments or adaptations are appropriate.

What is required for residential services?

Most institutions will have specially adapted rooms within their residences, or will make reasonable adjustments. However, as new accommodation is built or refurbished, it is essential to ensure that rooms are accessible for wheelchair users and that there are kitchens with adjustable height work surfaces; some rooms may need clear colour contrast or extra power sockets and so forth. Specially adapted rooms should be integrated and not separated from, mainstream accommodation.

Consideration needs to be given to allocation and charging policies. If specially adapted rooms are only available in more expensive accommodation the level of rent charged might need to be reviewed for some students. Allocation policies need to be fair and transparent, particularly where students may be allocated a room for the duration of their course rather than for a first or final year. Many institutions have a private sector housing office, and thought needs to be given to what help and advice is offered to both students and landlords. There are particular issues where services are contracted out as the institution still has responsibility for ensuring that reasonable and anticipatory adjustments are made. It therefore needs to be specific about the standards required and have a process in place for verifying that these standards have been met.

Again students should be given every opportunity and encouragement to declare a disability when applying for accommodation. Application forms should ask if the student has a disability and requires any specific facilities or adaptations to the room. It should be made clear on the form or in guidance notes why this information is being sought and how it will be used. Staff should be trained to ask for information in a sensitive and appropriate manner and should be clear about what is already in place and what additional adjustments can be made.

The way forward

Whilst some students will have very specific individual needs, many of the reasonable and anticipatory adjustments that can be made will benefit the majority of students with a disability and also benefit the student community as a whole. Good clear information available on the web benefits all students and is of particular value to international students. Transparent policies ensure that all students are aware of what they are, and are not, entitled to. Improved signage and clear identification of easy access routes and buildings benefits everyone including potential applicants and visitors and makes the whole environment more welcoming. Well-informed, well-trained staff members raise the level of customer service and benefit the university community. Many of the staff training needs can be incorporated into existing training programmes thus incurring no additional costs. Improvement to signage and colour schemes can be undertaken as areas become due for redecoration or refurbishment.

Most institutions have undertaken an access audit and identified improvements that could be made to the buildings. It may now be helpful to audit existing provision, policies and staff training. Many institutions may be pleasantly surprised by what is already in place and this will help to identify any gaps in provision. Thought should be given to creating a 'base line provision', determining what it is reasonable for central and residential service to have in place. This should be costed so that sources of funding can be identified and adjustments prioritised.

Policies should be regularly reviewed and guidance given to staff on how to implement them effectively. Feedback and comment should be sought from a cross section of the student population through questionnaires and focus groups to ensure that provision is appropriate. If institutions are honest and open with students and seek to adopt a 'can do' attitude the whole student community will benefit, and issues are more likely to be resolved at an early stage rather than escalating into litigation.

The White Paper

Although some of the costs of making reasonable adjustments can be absorbed through existing budgets the issue of funding cannot be ignored. In its 2003 White Paper on *The Future of Higher Education*, the government states that its new package includes:

- *restoring grants for students from lower income families and abolishing up-front fees for all;*
- *requesting universities to draw up an Access Agreement to improve access for disadvantaged students, before they are able to increase the level of fee they ask students to pay;*
- *appointing an independent Access Regulator to oversee these agreements, and promote wider access and to ensure that admission procedures are fair, professional and transparent;*
  and, most importantly,
- *...reforming funding so that universities and colleges will be, properly reimbursed for extra costs in attracting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds. (DfES 2003)*

Those institutions that have been revising their procedures to ensure they comply with SENDA may find that they are already on the way to delivering some of the reforms identified in the White Paper and will therefore be eligible for some of this promised funding.

However, institutions will also need to ensure they are making provision for students, including international students, for whom statutory funding is limited or non-existent. Here, clear, explicit and well publicised policies, joined-up admissions processes, and perhaps even a University contingency fund, should all be put in place; in most institutions, these can be developed easily from already existing practices and procedures.

Institutions have repeatedly articulated their commitment to wider participation and inclusion. The disability discrimination legislation and the widening participation initiative place a requirement on institutions to demonstrate this commitment. A significant amount of this work has already been undertaken and is embedded into university policy and practise. Now is the time to highlight that achievement, to share best practise and to demonstrate the sector's ongoing commitment to delivering a high quality inclusive service to the student population as a whole.

References

DfES 2003: *The Future of Higher Education*. Department for Education and Skills, http://www.dfes.gov.uk/highereducation/hestrategy/exec.shtml (accessed March 2004)

HEFCE 1999: *Guidance on Base-Level Provision for Disabled Students in Higher Education Institutions*. HEFCE Guide 99/04. Bristol: Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Web C3 2004: *Web Accessibility Initiative*. http://www.w3.org/WAI/ (accessed March 2004)

Other resources

Disability Rights Commission 2002: *Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Part 4. Code of Practice for Providers of Post-16 Education and Related Services*. Stratford-upon-Avon: Disability Rights Commission.

Disability Rights Commission 2002: *Central Services: the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4*. Stratford-upon-Avon: Disability Rights Commission.

Disability Rights Commission 2002: *Residential Services: the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4*. Stratford-upon-Avon: Disability Rights Commission.

Dr David Owens was formerly Dean of Students at Cardiff University and Chair of AMOSSHE. David now works freelance and is undertaking projects and commissions for the Welsh Assembly Government and the NHS in Wales.

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Editors' note.
Since this article was submitted, the disability legislation has been further developed in a new act: the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which, *inter alia*, will place a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality. Further information about this act and its implications for higher education can be obtained from the SKILL (www.skill.org.uk) and the National Disability Team (http://www.natdisteam.ac.uk/resources_knowledge.html) websites.

Quality Assurance within Higher Education Careers Services

Jan Perrett

Delivering a quality service has always been of prime importance to higher education careers services but until recently, for many, formal accreditation had never been required. In the mid-nineties, a split was emerging within the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) community. On the one side were those institutions that were actively involved in bidding for funding delivered via regional partnerships and who required quality accreditation in order to be eligible. On the other side were careers services within universities whose agendas were not so focused on regional funding.

For those of us within AGCAS who were concerned with professional development and status, this was a worrying situation. It represented a two-tier system. With the rising importance of quality marks within the public and private sector and the requirement that the former statutory careers services should be accredited against Guidance Council standards, Higher Education was increasingly out of step with the professional guidance community. In an era of accountability, how could we present to our many and varied stakeholders evidence that all AGCAS services were offering a high standard of information, advice and guidance (IAG) delivery?

AGCAS standards

It was agreed by the AGCAS Executive Board that we should enter into discussions with the Guidance Council about accreditation for higher education careers services. We could simply have asked all our services to apply for accreditation against the National Quality Standards for Learning and Work (NQSLW - often called the Guidance Council Standards) but it was felt that these standards did not address the uniqueness of Higher Education work. Feedback from services that had been through the process confirmed this. They felt constrained to fit the work they did into a rigid framework that did not fully reflect the varied activities of higher education careers work.

With the support of the Guidance Council, AGCAS formulated its own set of standards which were mapped against the NQSLW but reflected the specific context of higher education. We were given permission to create two new standards: institutional alignment and vacancy handling. These are aspects of our work that were not addressed at all within NQSLW. With the new AGCAS Standards in place, we began to design an accreditation process using our own assessors.

During this period, we were aware of a heightened interest from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE - now the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)) in the progress of this work. The Harris report (DfEE 2002) had highlighted the importance of quality assurance and had recommended that AGCAS should reconsider its position vis-à-vis accreditation:

> *There should be a single accreditation process for professional standards for Higher Education Careers Services. AGCAS, the Guidance Council and the Guidance Accreditation Board should determine how this can best be achieved.*
> (Recommendation 38)

This, together with the discussions around institutional policies for careers education, information and guidance, had brought higher education careers services centre stage and there was a certain amount of concern from the DfES about our decision to implement a separate quality system.

The emergence of matrix

At this point, there emerged an ironic twist in the tale. Whilst our AGCAS Professional Development Officer and Training Manager was struggling with the prescriptive, audit-driven approach of the NQSLW, the DfES was plotting change. As a result of feedback from users of the old standards, they set up a review process, which resulted in the withdrawal of those standards and the introduction of a more user-friendly, flexible framework, eventually launched as matrix; this was exactly what we had originally wanted from a quality tool.

The timing of this decision caused us some grief as we had just announced our accreditation process to the membership at our national conference. Fortunately, AGCAS was fully involved in the revision discussions with the Guidance Council, and so we felt that we were able to influence the shape and approach of the new standard from the outset. We appreciated the emphasis on continuous quality improvement, rather than audit and we were enthusiastic about an accreditation process that was flexible enough to encompass the variations in IAG delivery that exist within HE careers services. Basically, we believed that matrix provided an excellent framework for self-assessment and service improvement and we were happy to recommend it to our members.

The DfES responded to this decision with enthusiasm, since it effectively allowed them to say that Harris Recommendation 38 was likely to be implemented. We were also invited to undertake a funded project for them to investigate the appropriateness of the matrix framework to the work of HE careers services. The results of this project were largely favourable and we were able to reassure the DfES that we would proceed with our plan to adopt matrix as our preferred quality assurance tool.

A single accreditation process

However, the framework itself was only half of the equation. Matrix, we felt, was a tool that would provide a useful foundation for continuous quality improvement within our services. Assessment, on the other hand, had been a significant, and not always positive, issue for services that had been accredited against NQSLW, and assessment lay with the Guidance Accreditation Board (GAB). The DfES had urged us to consider a single accreditation process and so our relationship and dialogue with GAB began.

My own position as AGCAS Quality and Accreditation Co-ordinator was designed to advise the Executive Board on issues of quality assurance, but was also heavily operational in nature. I spent a great deal of time building good working relationships with GAB, the Guidance Council and the DfES and ensuring that higher education was fully involved in discussions about accreditation.

We now have one AGCAS assessor, who has been trained in exactly the same way as those on the independent register and who is able to conduct assessments within any part of a higher education institution. The DfES has approved this situation and indeed has encouraged us in the process, since the feeling amongst AGCAS Heads of Service was strongly in favour of assessors who understood the HE context.

We have also set up a network of matrix consultants, trained by the Guidance Council specifically for AGCAS services. This allows us to give support to our services in their preparation for accreditation and also provides a means of disseminating good practice and quality training.

The matrix framework

The matrix standard is basically designed in two interconnecting parts – service delivery and service management. A service applying for accreditation would be encouraged to assess itself initially against the framework. At the heart of the standard are the core elements of information, advice and guidance and surrounding those are elements that refer to management of the service and service delivery.

Elements 1 to 5 (Service Delivery) presented few problems for careers services, since this is our raison d'etre and is regularly scrutinised by various internal and external assessment processes. On the other hand, elements 6 to10 (Service Management) represented for some services issues which are not always within their own control, for example, institutional policies or appropriateness of premises. However, some heads of service have reported that discussions about these elements with senior managers within institutions, has led to a greater understanding of appropriate funding and resourcing of careers services. In fact, the process of seeking accreditation is often helpful to heads of service in gaining recognition of their excellent work within their own institutions.

The emphasis on continuous quality improvement is extremely positive for a service since it fits into the ongoing drive for excellence and provides a useful tool for reflection and planning.

The assessment process

Assessment against the matrix framework is conducted by on-site visit. After the application to GAB, a visit is scoped according to the information provided by the service. GAB will then confirm the number of days required, the number of locations to be visited and also the number of interviews to be conducted. Most AGCAS services have been scoped at 3 plus 1, that is three days on site and one day for planning and report writing. Small services have been scoped at 2 plus 1 and one large service at 4 plus 1. The current cost of assessment is £550 +VAT per day plus a set rate of expenses. Accreditation lasts for three years.

The on-site visit programme is negotiated between the assessor and the service representative and would normally comprise interviews with the head of the service, a senior manager within the institution, members of staff involved in IAG delivery, students (both users and non-users) and other stakeholders such as academics and employers. The assessor may also observe front line activities and interactions with students, but is unlikely to sit in on workshops or guidance interviews. Visits to other locations are usually included in the programme so that the assessor can see the premises and resources available. A decision is given at the closing meeting on the last day and a report is sent to the service within a few weeks.

All AGCAS services that have been assessed so far comment on the rigorous nature of the assessment, but also on the professional and fair way in which it is conducted. All have found it to be a valuable learning experience.

Main benefits of matrix accreditation

External national accreditation
In these days of public scrutiny and accountability, it is essential that a customer-centred service such as a careers service should be able to demonstrate to its stakeholders that it is providing a quality service. There are numerous ways of doing this, from student surveys to internal university reviews. However, external accreditation gives extra credibility to the service itself and also to the institution that provides the service. It is clear from the debate about institutional review, and the growing interest in league tables, that universities are expected simultaneously to demonstrate excellence and value for money. Until and unless the QAA includes student services within its remit, accreditation against an external quality mark such as matrix is a worthwhile investment. For the staff involved in delivery of IAG it is also a welcome and well-deserved recognition of their professionalism.

> *It did wonders for our reputation and standing both within the university and outside.* (Surrey Institute of Art and Design University College)

Process
One of the fundamental themes of the matrix standard is involvement of all staff in continuous quality improvement. Thus the process of preparing for accreditation brings a service together and creates a better understanding of roles and responsibilities. For example, a careers service may have several semi-independent units, such as job shop, employer liaison and/or project teams, and the process of preparation for matrix will provide opportunities for staff to discuss issues together and reach greater mutual understanding.

All the careers services that have been accredited thus far have spoken about the benefit of enhanced teamworking from the process.

> *The process was extremely effective in enhancing team work and forming us into a more cohesive service.*
> (University of Nottingham)

Policies and systems
Elements 6-10 of the framework ask for evidence of a shared vision and a consistency of service delivery. There is a requirement for the service to be managed effectively and for target/objectives to be set for delivery and for staff development. Most importantly, matrix looks for evidence that all members of staff have the opportunity to be involved in planning and review.

In essence this means that policies and systems should be designed by the staff members who use them rather than by senior management. Careers services that have been through accreditation report that this has been a major bonus. Rather than top-down policy decisions, staff are committed to policies that they must implement and are thoroughly conversant with the systems and procedures that underpin them.

> *This was not just a cynical exercise. It gave us the opportunity and structure to take stock and really look at what we were doing.*
> (University of Newcastle)

This is a particular example of the changed emphasis of accreditation. Under the old standards, the approach was very audit-driven, based on the production of a portfolio, which the assessor would check against the evidence requirements. Now, assessment is done via visits and interviews, and naturally occurring evidence is sought to satisfy the criteria. Policy for policy's sake is unacceptable. Policies are created to inform and consolidate practice and should be dynamic in their nature.

Client feedback

It is a requirement of matrix that client feedback is used to inform planning and continuous quality improvement. Careers services have always engaged in some form of feedback collection and indeed, the NQSLW and AGCAS standards were extremely prescriptive about this. The use of questionnaires was compulsory and even the questions themselves were prescribed. This resulted in the collection of large numbers of questionnaires that were often stored away to gather dust until the next assessment came round. Many services complained of questionnaire fatigue amongst clients, who could be given three different questionnaires in the course of one visit to the service.

Matrix does not prescribe: it frees up the service to decide its own monitoring and evaluation plan and to design its own tools. This has opened up possibilities for the use of focus groups, mystery shopper, different questionnaires and student consultants. It has also encouraged services to use a more sensible timetable of feedback collection, so that clients are not overloaded.

However, matrix does put a great deal of emphasis on use of feedback. An assessor is not interested in a pile of questionnaires, but rather in evidence that things have changed as a result of the feedback. This is a vitalising aspect of our work, involving the client in decisions about future developments. The matrix framework has put the client firmly at the heart of our quality assurance and this is very much in line with the client-centred approach of IAG delivery.

Review of service

Any review process will inevitably prompt a service to take stock and evaluate its working practices. The self-assessment bias of matrix is particularly challenging in this respect. A service is encouraged to 'tell its story' to the assessor and then to show that its management and service delivery is appropriate to this story. Many people who had submitted their portfolio under the old standards felt initially that matrix was vague and unhelpful in its very generic framework. How could one framework fit the diverse activities of careers services, student services, voluntary groups and even employers?

Yet it is the lack of prescription and specificity that provides the greatest challenge. It is impossible even to fill in the GAB Request for Assessment form without thoroughly exploring the nature of the service, its purpose and the entitlement of its clients. Every careers service that has sought accreditation under matrix has commented on the powerful stimulus it provides to question assumptions and revisit first principles.

Every aspect of student service is under pressure to deliver to growing numbers of demanding clients from increasingly diverse backgrounds. It is tempting to be so consumed by activity that we miss the opportunity to listen to the client. Preparation for accreditation against the matrix framework encourages all staff, from managers to front line, to see their service through a client's eyes. Are the messages clear? Is the service appropriate to the client's needs? Why do we do certain things and not others? Do we communicate effectively with our clients? These are basic questions that we do not always have time to address.

> *...the process provided us with a framework for reflection on current practice and enabled all staff to look at their work and supporting infrastructure. It also provided a tangible opportunity to look at current practice against Careers Service plans and targets.* (University of Sheffield)

AGCAS and AMOSSHE

AGCAS has made a commitment to quality assurance by requiring all institutional members to seek accreditation against the matrix framework by the summer of 2005. Most careers services have now registered their intentions but we are aware of a number who are awaiting the decision of their Student Service Manager. At the time of writing, over fifty HE careers services have been successfully accredited.

There is no requirement yet for student services to be externally accredited by GAB although a recent report from UUK/SCOP (2002) made the following recommendation:

> *Institutions should consider the use of recognised standards for information, advice and guidance services, including Student Services, such as the matrix quality standard.*

GAB is keen to encourage institutions to consider matrix for the quality assurance of all its IAG delivery and in particular to encourage student service units to seek accreditation as an integrated service. In some institutions, the careers service has served as a trailblazer for the rest of student services and the re-assessment in two years time will include all units. Since assessment will be of the umbrella unit rather than of several individual units, the cost should not be a great deal more than the cost of assessing the careers service; GAB is ultimately responsible for scoping the assessment visits.*

Representatives from AGCAS and AMOSSHE have begun to meet regularly in order to share information about our services and to develop a relationship based on shared values and practices. Matrix is clearly a matter of common concern and we have already begun to discuss the issues of accreditation. AGCAS is keen to ensure that its own services can move forward with the process and we appreciate that an ongoing dialogue with AMOSSHE is essential to this goal.

Summary

AGCAS believes that the matrix Quality Standard is the most appropriate and effective tool for continuous quality improvement in IAG delivery. The last two years have not been easy. My role has been to win the hearts and minds of the AGCAS community and to encourage heads of service to view accreditation as a positive step towards a better deal for clients.

Not everyone is convinced. Some remain sceptical about the need for accreditation and about the specific process we have chosen. Many are worried by the recurring costs of assessment within tightening budgets. I would, again, refer to the positive reactions of those who have engaged with the process so far and who feel that the benefits of embedding continuous quality improvement within our services will be self-evident in a better service for clients.

> *We are certainly proud to be the first Higher Education Careers Service to achieve the matrix Standard, which we firmly believe to be a relevant and rigorous method of benchmarking whether or not your service is delivering a genuine 'quality' service, as well as being a powerful framework on which to base good practice and continuous improvement.* (University of Newcastle)

References

DfEE 2001: *Developing Modern Higher Education Careers Services. Report of the Review led by Sir Martin Harris Vice-Chancellor, University of Manchester.* Nottingham: Department for Education and Employment Publications.

UUK/SCOP 2002: *Student Services: effective approaches to retaining students in higher education.* London: Universities UK/ Standing Conference of Principals of Colleges of Higher Education.

Useful web sites

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS): www.agcas.org.uk

Matrix: www.matrixstandard.com

Guidance Accreditation Board (GAB): www.gab.org.uk

* The assessment body for matrix is now EMQC, an independent not for profit company that specialises in the assessment of organisations against National Standards. There has been a recent review of the structure of the matrix standard to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, but the basic principles and processes remain the same. The matrix website (see above) provides full details.

Jan Perret is the Deputy Director of the Careers Advisory Service at the University of Nottingham and AGCAS Quality and Accreditation Coordinator.

The organisation, scale and scope of student service provision in AMOSSHE member institutions

Annie Grant

Recent national initiatives, most notably government widening participation policies, have drawn attention to the increasing importance of the role of student services in higher education, particularly in respect of their role in facilitating student progression and achievement (see, for example, UUK/SCOP 2002). This profile-raising has been generally welcomed by student service managers, but it has also raised an anxiety that some UK higher education policy makers, budget holders, and, indeed, senior staff within higher education institutions, do not have an accurate understanding of 'student services' and the potential and limitations of their contributions.

In the last decade, the Association of Managers of Student Services (AMOSSHE) has undertaken biennial surveys of its membership in order to record both the scope of members' responsibilities and the way that student service provision is organised, financed and located within member institutions. The broad format of the survey instrument has remained largely unchanged over this period, although there have been some revisions from year to year. The most recent questionnaire was sent out to all Institutional Representative Members (IRMs) at the beginning of the 2002/3 academic year with a covering letter asking for a response by 30 November 2002. This report presents an analysis of the responses to the part of the questionnaire that addressed broad issues of structure, scale and scope of responsibilities and finance[1]. Its aim is two-fold: to disseminate information that will allow AMOSSHE members to benchmark their own provision and resources, and to further a general understanding of student service provision and contribution within the HE sector.

Responses

At the time of the 2002 survey, 115 of the 122 Universities UK (UUK) and 37 Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) member institutions were members of AMOSSHE. Forty-two completed or partially completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 37 percent for AMOSSHE members and of 26 percent for the sector as a whole (Table 1). Despite this relatively low response rate, a wide range of different types of institution was represented; breakdowns by sector and size (student numbers) are given in Tables 1 and 2. The majority of respondents (81%) were from English institutions, with 12 percent from Scotland and 7 percent from Wales.

Type of institution	N	%
Post –1992	16	38
Pre-1992	16	38
College of Higher Education	7	17
Specialist Institution	3	7
Total	**42**	

Table 1: breakdown of survey responses by sector

Total number of students	N
< 3000	4
3000 to 5999	5
6000 to 8999	6
9000 to 11999	4
12000 to 14999	5
15000 to 17999	4
18000 to 20999	0
21000 to 23999	6
24000 to 26999	3
> 27000	3
Total	**40[2]**

Table 2: responses by size of institution (total student numbers; minimum 658, maximum 37282)

1. Analyses of responses to sections on areas of specific responsibility will be disseminated at a later date.

Institutions vary not only in respect of their student numbers, but also in their student profiles. The majority of students in most institutions are undergraduates, but three of the respondents were from institutions in which over half the students were postgraduates. The proportions of international students also range from one or two percent to approximately a quarter. The dominant mode of study in most institutions is full-time, but 36 percent of respondents were from institutions where a quarter to a half of their undergraduate students are studying part-time, and if postgraduate students are included, this proportion rises to 54 percent. A small number of institutions also offer support to students studying on sub-degree programmes. The student profile has a major impact on the focus of student service provision and its priorities.

What's in a name?

The most common name given by institutions to their central student provision is Student Services (44% of respondents), followed by Student Support Services (16%). Some names are more specific, usually reflecting a relatively narrow focus in respect of members' responsibilities (for example, Advice and Counselling). Five of the IRMs managed services that did not include 'student' in their title but described their provision without specifying the client base, using terms such as advice/advisory, counselling, guidance, educational development, or a combination of these. There is an increasing tendency for the client base of AMOSSHE members to extend beyond students. Very many provide consultancy or training on student-related matters to academic and non-academic staff, but some offer dedicated staff services, most commonly counselling and in at least one member institution, teaching and learning development.

Institutional structures and reporting lines

Respondents were asked to indicate their location within their institution and the job title of the person to whom they report. Seventeen of those who responded to this question (45%) stated that they were responsible for a separate or free-standing unit; the others indicated that they were a part of a larger unit within their institution, most commonly the registry/Registrar's, Secretary's or Academic Registrar's office (12 respondents: 32%). Other locations include a Marketing and External Relations Office, an Academic Affairs Department and a very broad student service and administration office including other service providers.

The job title of each IRM's immediate line manager provides further information about institutional organisational structures. In one pre-1992 institution and two specialist institutions, the IRM reports directly to the head of the institution. In most other institutions, the IRMs are a further one or two steps down in institutional hierarchies; Table 4 summarises reporting arrangements by HE sector.

Sector/ IRM line manager	Pre-1992	Post-1992	College of HE/ Specialist institution	All
Head of Institution	1		2	3
Deputy or Pro-Vice Chancellor	3	10	5	18
Registrar/Head of Administration	7		1	8
Academic Registrar	3	1		4
Head of administrative office	1	1	2	4
Dean/Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor		2		2
Total N	**15**	**14**	**10**	**39**

Table 3: reporting lines for heads of student service organisations by sector

2. Statistics presented in tables exclude non-responses unless otherwise indicated.

It is encouraging to note the large proportion of institutions (75%) in which the IRM was no more than two steps away from its head; in the remainder they appear to be only three steps away. Given the sample size, the overall variation by sector is not significant. However, the direct line management involvement of a Pro- or Deputy Vice-Chancellor is far more common in post- than in pre-1992 institutions; in the latter, student services fall more commonly within the remit of a Registrar/Secretary.

Although this was not an area they were specifically asked about, several members gave useful information about their representation on institutional committees. Several mention their membership of their institution's senior management teams and major committees, including those responsible for planning and resources, learning and teaching, academic development, academic standards, equal opportunities and quality assurance.

Respondents also provided more detailed information about the structuring of their own services and that of their institutions. There is significant variation in the extent to which there is an integration of provision across the range of functional areas managed: some services have a very integrated or even one-stop-shop structure, while in others the IRM has an umbrella responsibility for a number of semi-autonomous specialised units. Several respondents mentioned their close working relationships with other providers, both within and external to their institution.

Further structural complexity is indicated by responses to questions that asked respondents to indicate the number of separate student service locations within their institution (excluding halls of residence) and the number of separate sites/campuses on which there is significant student service presence. Only 5 (12%) responding IRMs have a single location for their service; more commonly (48%) there are two or three separate locations, and 40 percent of members have their provision distributed in at least four different locations. In one institution there are 12 different locations; here the IRM has an overarching responsibility for many individual specialist units within a very large institution.

Two thirds of members are responsible for providing services not only at different locations on the same site, but on at least two separate sites or campuses; in some institutions these campuses may be 40 or more miles apart.

Level of responsibility/ area of responsibility	Full	Joint	Significant involvement	None
Accommodation	19	5	14	62
Careers	57	5	2	36
Childcare	26	7	10	57
Counselling	93	0	2	5
Disability	71	10	12	7
Spiritual and faith support	48	5	26	21
Student finance	81	2	7	10
Health	45	10	17	29
International students	50	7	17	26
Sports/fitness	17	5	10	70
Welfare advice	74	2	5	19
Learning support/study skills	31	5	7	57

Table 5: percentages of members with managerial responsibility or significant involvement in listed specialist areas

Provision of services on multiple campuses is more commonly a feature of the remit of those in post-1992 (85%) than in pre-1992 (53%) institutions. In some institutions a permanent 'satellite' presence is maintained, while in others provision is through visiting or peripatetic staff.

Scope and scale of responsibilities

Members were given a list of areas of provision and asked to indicate their level of managerial responsibility, choosing from the following options: direct responsibility, joint responsibility, significant input but no managerial responsibility, no responsibility. Table 5 summarises this information. Thirty-nine of the 42 respondents had full responsibility for counselling provision and a further member had a significant input. The other common areas of full responsibility were student finance (81%), disability (71%) and welfare advice (74%). Joint responsibility was relatively unusual, but was found in all areas except counselling, and most frequently in respect of disability and health provision.

The areas of responsibility that were least often part of the remit of those responding to the questionnaire are sports/fitness (17%), accommodation (19%), childcare (26%) and learning support (31%) (percentages indicate proportions with full responsibility).

Only 55 percent of the respondents had full managerial responsibility for careers although a further 7 percent had some level of input; two respondents had joint responsibility and one significant involvement. There was a difference between the two main HE sectors in this area of provision: 77 percent of the respondents in post-1992 institutions had full responsibility for careers compared with only 32 percent in pre-1992 institutions. Full responsibility for childcare and accommodation was also more frequently part of the remit of members in post-1992 (46% and 23% respectively) than pre-1992 (16% and 0% respectively) institutions.

Respondents were also asked to indicate any other areas for which they had managerial responsibility; those listed include admissions and recruitment, registry, facilities management, institutional postgraduate facilities, learning and teaching development and student and staff volunteering.
Some members had individual responsibility for only one or two main functional areas, while others had a very much broader individual remit, in some instances responsible for at least ten functions. Table 6 provides a very general indication of the range in the scope of the responsibilities of individual members: the table gives a count of those areas listed in table 5 for which members had full managerial responsibility, plus an additional point if they indicated at least one other area of major responsibility not on the list provided.

The survey questionnaire also provided a second list of more specific areas of responsibility, asking respondents again to indicate their level of involvement. Responses are summarised in Table 7.

The responses to this section give further evidence of the range of, and variation in, members' responsibilities. Most respondents (88%) had some level of involvement in promoting and ensuring equal opportunities, and approximately two-thirds play a role in

Number of areas of responsibility	Number of respondents	Number of areas of responsibility	Number of respondents
1	1	7	10
2	1	8	8
3	2	9	2
4	6	10	3
5	4		
6	4	N	41

Table 6: number of areas for which respondents have full managerial responsibility

Level of responsibility/ area of responsibility	Full	Joint	Significant involvement	None	Total N
Community liaison	10	5	34	51	20
Cultural activities	2	8	12	78	9
Educational guidance	15	10	24	51	20
Equal opportunities	12	15	61	12	36
Student charter or equivalent	26	8	31	36	25
Students' Union	15	3	50	33	27

Table 7: percentages of members with managerial responsibility or significant involvement in listed areas. The total column gives the number with input at any level of responsibility.

their institutions' Students Union and their student charter. Approximately a half have some level of input in respect of community liaison and educational guidance but input to cultural activities is very rarely part of an IRM's responsibility.

The one area of additional responsibility for which there were evident differences by sector was educational guidance. None of the respondents from pre-1992 institutions had full responsibility for this area although a third have some level of involvement; in contrast, a third of members from post-1992 institutions have this responsibility and a further quarter significant input to the provision.

Other responsibilities listed include complaints procedures, widening participation, mature student support, student discipline, legal advice, graduation ceremonies, job shop, central induction, access and lifelong learning support, and, in one institution, significant involvement in community psychiatric services.

Staff and financial responsibilities

Members were asked to provide information about the numbers of staff that they managed, and their pay and non-pay budgets. Several respondents did not respond to all these questions, so the subsequent analysis is based on a reduced sample size.

Staff numbers	N institutions	Core staff %	Casual staff %	Project staff %
1 - 10	3	70 –100	0 – 20	0 – 10
11 - 20	5	82 – 100	0 – 21	0 – 18
21 - 30	3	62 – 100	0 – 24	0 – 14
31 – 40	7	42 – 98	0 – 52	0 – 6
41 – 50	5	38 – 100	0 – 63	0 – 20
51 – 60	2	81 – 95	0	5 – 19
61 – 80	4	70 – 100	0 – 30	0 – 2
81 – 100	3	85 – 100	0	0 – 15
101 - 120	3	93 – 100	2 – 13	0 – 6
121 - 140	2	20 - 57	29 - 80	0 - 14
Total N	**37**			

Table 8: summary of student service staff numbers

In respect of staff numbers, the range was very considerable: core staff numbers ranged from 2 to 114 (counted by FTE the range is 3.6 to 80) and total staff numbers ranged from 5 to 140 (3.6 to 130 FTE). Table 8 provides a summary together with an indication of the proportion of staff members (total numbers) who are core, casual and project staff.

The figures included in the table are further indicative of diversity in the sector. In some institutions a significant proportion of student service staff are project or casual staff (up to 20% and 80% respectively of total staff numbers); in contrast, in a third of institutions for which this information was provided, all staff were core funded. Overall, 83 percent of staff members were core staff. One service in a large institution was exceptional in employing very large numbers of casual staff, but in only two other institutions were fewer than half the staff members non-core: one was a specialist institution and the other a relatively small HEI. Other institutions had up to 20 percent of staff funded from project income; the average was 5 percent. Half of all the services represented had some project-funded staff.

Staffing numbers are inevitably reflected in budgets, and staff budgets range from £219,000 to £2,970,000. Significant contributions were made to the staff and non-staff budgets of some institutions by project income and widening participation and disability premiums. The most common sources of project or additional income reported are funding councils (for example, HEFCE and HEFCW disability initiatives, SHEFC funding for widening access, the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF), the Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and the Community fund (HEROBC)), and the DfES (including Access administration funds). Other income sources include Learning and Skills Councils and the European Social Fund. Some services have accessed more specific sources of income relating to particular areas of responsibility; these include grants from Sport England and, in one institution, staff funded directly by the Royal Literary Fellowship.

There is very considerable variation in members' non-pay budgets; in the 32 institutions for which this information was provided they range from £26,000 to £1,604000. The smallest budget was in a post-1992 institution where the IRM has a limited range of responsibilities, and the largest in an institution where the IRM manages a very large sport and recreation function. Three quarters of IRMs who provided the relevant information manage non-staff budgets of over £50,000 and over half manage budgets of over £100,000. There appears to be no consistency in the way that institutions set their student services non-pay budgets: there is no correlation with size of institution as measured by student numbers (statistically, these latter explain only 7% of the budget variance), core staff numbers (only 14% of the variance is explained) or numbers of areas of responsibility as shown in Table 6 (only 2% of the variance explained).

A number of IRMs are responsible for generating income, particularly those who manage careers services or sports and recreation facilities. One respondent commented that for some of their areas of responsibility they were allocated a negative budget by their institution, as there was an income target to be met. In future surveys it might be worthwhile to investigate further the ways in which AMOSSHE members have been able to add to their resources through income generation.

Salary levels

The questionnaire asked members to give their current salaries and/or their grades. Inevitably, and perhaps understandably, many members were reluctant to give this information, particularly in respect of their precise salary levels. Nonetheless, 23 respondents gave either their salary or their salary range; where members provided the latter, the average of the range was used for subsequent analysis. The average

Current salary (£)	N	%
< 30,000	2	9
From 30,000 to 34,999	2	9
From 35,000 to 39,999	6	26
From 40,000 to 44,999	6	26
From 45,000 to 49,999	2	9
> 50,000	5	22
N	23	

Table 9: 2002 salary levels (range £23,000 to £58,000; mean £41,402)

salary for all respondents to this question was £41,400; Table 9 provides a breakdown.
Six members reported an element of performance related pay within their remuneration package; they were all from post-1992 institutions and had significantly higher than average salaries.

Further analysis was undertaken to see if there were any consistent factors linked to salary levels. Firstly, the average salary was calculated by type of institution (Table 10). This suggested that salary levels were on average higher in the post-1992 sector, although the small size of the sample for all groups, but particularly for the specialist institutions, urge caution in extrapolating from these results.

Salary levels were also analysed by size of institution as measured by student numbers, by the breadth of the members' responsibilities, core non-pay budgets and core staff numbers,

Type of institution	Average salary (£)	N
Post -1992	46,000	8
Pre-1992	41,000	7
College of Higher Education	38,000	5
Specialist Institution	35,000	3

Table 10: average salaries by institution type (rounded to the nearest £1000)

but there were no statistical correlations: institution size explains only 4 percent of the salary variance, number of areas of responsibility (Table 6) explains 9 percent, non-pay budget explains 8 percent, and staff numbers explain 19 percent. However, the mean salary for those with the most responsibilities (see Table 6) is higher than for those with the fewest.

From the evidence available, it is very difficult to find any evidence of consistency in salary levels of AMOSSHE members, or of any relationship between the scale or the scope of members' responsibilities and their remuneration.

How have things changed?

Tracking trends in the development of student services over the last decade is impeded by the lack of consistency in the survey responses from year to year. Sample sizes have varied, as has the breakdown of respondents by institutional type and size; only 11 institutions returned surveys in each of the survey years since 1995[3], and a further 12 in all but one of the survey years.

A summary of some of the key areas of responsibility held by IRMs over the last decade is provided in Table 11. The areas that most commonly fall within their remit have remained the same: counselling, disability support and welfare/financial advice, with between 80 and 100 percent of members carrying these responsibilities during this period. The proportions of members with responsibility for, or significant input to, international students, spiritual/faith support, health and careers have also remained fairly constant, averaging between 70 and 80 percent.

The scope of members' responsibilities in some of the areas listed in Table 11 appears to have declined, particularly in respect of accommodation, childcare, sports/fitness and learning support/study skills. However, accommodation, childcare, and study skills are more frequently part of the remit of those in post- than in pre-1992 institutions, and there has been a significant increase in the proportion of respondents from the latter sector since 1999/2000. This reflects a more general change in the composition of the AMOSSHE membership that is further discussed below.

Discussion and conclusions

The survey results outlined in this paper are based on responses from 37 percent of AMOSSHE member institutions. A wide range of institution types is represented and there were responses from all regions of the UK, apart from Northern Ireland. The response rate for the UK higher education sector as a whole was 26 percent; approximately 30 percent of UK HEIs are not currently members of AMOSSHE. These latter include both

3. Excluding 2001/2002, when the results were anonymised.

Area of responsibility	95/96	97/98	99/00	01/02	03/04
Accommodation	62	67	57	29	38
Careers	78	79	73	63	64
Childcare	83	78	72	66	43
Counselling	100	100	94	97	95
Disability	100	100	96	91	93
Spiritual and faith support	80	90	80	66	79
Student finance	}95*	}100*	80	89	90
Welfare advice			84	83	81
Health	85	86	84	80	74
International students	80	90	84	54	73
Sports/fitness	61	41	40	23	30
Learning support/study skills	73	64	39	-	43
Pre-1992 HEIs	10	10	25	34	38
Post-1992 HEIs	73	63	47	40	38
Colleges/Specialist institutions	17	27	28	26	24
< 6000 students	12	17	20	-	23
6000 – 11999 students	26	30	17	-	25
12000 – 17999 students	40	33	37	-	23
18000 – 23999 students	21	17	20	-	15
> 24000 students	1	3	7	-	15
N	**41**	**30**	**51**	**35**	**42**

*Table 11: percentages of AMOSSHE IRMs with managerial responsibility or significant input to key student service areas (1995/6 to 2002/3). A breakdown by size of institution (student numbers) and/or sector is included for comparative purposes. * Areas not differentiated.*

institutions that are eligible for membership but have not chosen to join, and those who are currently ineligible. Membership criteria state that the applicant must manage 'a significant portfolio of student service provision'; those who manage only a single functional area are not normally accepted for membership. There are some exceptions: for example, in one institution student support is devolved to separate sections but the heads of each section form a management team with a rotating chair. Thus the chair may be directly responsible for only one major function, but able to take on a broader representative role. In another institution there is a devolved structure, but the co-ordination of student support is through a student support network which reports to a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs; he/she is the AMOSSHE IRM.

There is very considerable variation in the ways that student services are organised, particularly in the extent to which there is an integration of provision across functional areas. In some, the IRM manages a set of individual units with relatively little cross-functional activity. In others, the manager places a very strong emphasis on the co-ordination of provision, and some have one-stop-shop arrangements. Most student support services are separate from student administrative services, but a small proportion of IRMs have both student administration and support responsibilities.

Institutions where student support is delivered through separate functional units without any single individual with an overall co-ordinating role are most commonly found in the pre-1992 sector. However, the landscape of student services is constantly shifting and reconfiguring itself. The proportion of institutions that are eligible for AMOSSHE membership is increasing, as more institutions bring together previously separate functions; this is reflected in the increased proportion of members from pre-1992 HEIs (see Table 11). Some respondents also noted internal reorganisations, either in progress or anticipated, that would change the range or scope of their responsibilities, or their position within institutional structures.

It is not uncommon for managers of student services to express frustration about their inability to get their voices heard and their contributions understood. There are, however, encouraging signs: the majority of IRMs who responded to this survey are placed fairly high up in their institutional hierarchies (Table 3) and several mentioned their membership of key committees that tie them into institutional decision-making processes.

This paper has attempted to provide an overview of members' responsibilities, but it has not been able to detail all of these. The scale and complexity of the areas managed by AMOSSHE members is constantly evolving as they respond to the growing numbers of students in higher education, the increasing diversity of the student body, and to new government and funding body initiatives. Individual institutions have responded to these changes in different ways, and the survey has demonstrated very clearly that there is no neat definition of 'student services' that has relevance across the HE sector; these organisations are as varied as the sector itself. The survey has also shown that there are no clear benchmarks in respect of budget allocation, staffing complement and IRMs' remuneration; nonetheless it has attempted to offer an overview that will provide some ammunition for those who are struggling to have a voice within their institutions, and be appropriately rewarded for the work that they do.

Reference

UUK 2002/SCOP: *Student Services: Effective approaches to retaining students in higher education*. London: Universities UK/ Standing Conference of Principals of Colleges of Higher Education

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A model for impartial pre-entry guidance for groups within the community

Rose Watson

Introduction

University College Worcester has been hosting a project offering impartial pre-entry guidance to widening participation groups within the community. The project has now completed its second year, and this article aims to describe the project and some of its findings.

Background

Good quality advice and guidance at the pre-entry stage is essential to widening participation. The majority of traditional students get their information, advice and guidance from family and friends. For those potential students from under-represented groups with no experience of higher education, these sources are non-existent: they lack the social capital identified by Ball (2001). In addition, universities are increasingly operating in a competitive environment that can result in partial information and very little guidance.

This can make it very difficult for the very people who need the most help to access it, resulting either in the loss of potential students, or students making the wrong choice of course and becoming alienated or dropping out. A recent report by Universities from the North East (Dodgson and Bolam 2002) has shown that pre-entry advice and guidance does have a positive impact on retention. Julia Dinsdale (2003) highlighted the lack of good impartial advice and guidance in Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and clearly identified the need for information, advice and guidance (IAG) in community settings.

Within this context, a joint bid was submitted to the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the HEFCE Widening Participation project to fund a full time worker with a remit to offer guidance to adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. The post, which received joint funding from both the LSC and HEFCE, was located within the Student Services department of University College Worcester (UCW). The remit of the postholder was to investigate a variety of guidance delivery mechanisms to adults within Herefordshire and Worcestershire, focusing particularly on under-represented groups. In addition the project aimed to offer feedback to UCW about the pre-entry needs of these groups and how these may impact on current institutional procedures and processes.

Planning

It was crucial that any provision offered should be appropriate to the needs of the community, so initially time was spent mapping existing IAG provision, community groups, and learning providers. As a result of this, the following became apparent:

- in order to work effectively in a community, it is important to be as visible and in touch as possible. However, the numbers of people considering entering HE are relatively low in any one area so resource implications need to be considered;
- the needs and culture of the two counties, from rural Herefordshire, to the northeast areas of Worcestershire, are very different, and the work would clearly take some time. There was a network of IAG provision across the region, but no others were offering specialist higher education support. Clearly it would be very important to work within the existing IAG network to offer a seamless service to clients in order to offer a relevant and professional service;
- many community and learning groups welcomed the service as one that would be of use to their clients, but others felt it would not be relevant: *our users don't go into Higher Education.* In such cases group leaders may be acting unwittingly as gate-keepers and denying full access to all the opportunities available. Various approaches may have to be developed in order to access these groups;
- in order to gain the trust of the community, the impartiality of the work would have to be ensured, so it would not be seen as a marketing exercise for an individual institution. However, if the work was effective, an important spin-off would be a positive image of the host institution,

which would be would be perceived as accessible and community-friendly.

The project

With the above considerations in mind, it was decided that the project should involve close liaison with current student support services and would trial a number of ways of working; these are outlined below.

Client referrals
An important initial step was to establish an effective referral system, whereby colleagues in the community and in IAG services could refer clients with higher education guidance needs. As a newcomer to the role, it takes time to become visible and be recognized in an established community and the publicity had to be right. Leaflets and flyers were produced but, as is often the case, personal contacts were always the most effective. Much time was spent visiting groups, attending meetings, and talking on the phone.

At times it felt as if I was spending all my time networking, with very little time spent offering the guidance. However, the groundwork paid off, and now the phone constantly rings, with the refrain: *Do you remember we met last autumn? Well I now have a client who would like to see you*. When a community group referral is made, I generally talk to that person on the phone, and then make arrangements to meet them. Sometimes this may be at the university if it seems appropriate, but more often it will be on that person's own territory. The venues used range from established community centres and colleges to places of work, job centres, playgroups and cafes. This accessibility is a key to the service's success. As one group said:

> *We appreciate (guidance worker) coming to us as we have so little help in the community and if the people who come to us had to travel to Worcester for information, they probably wouldn't bother.* (Family Centre)

Local guidance bases
In addition to taking referrals, we decided to trial a service that offered guidance regularly at an established base in areas where demand for guidance had traditionally been quite low. This was to establish whether or not being more visible within a community would generate demand for guidance. We worked on establishing a presence in two areas: a small rural market town and a deprived ward within a town close to Worcester. In both cases we have worked with the local IAG providers and have promoted the service by flyers, posters in shop windows, letters to parents of school children, and contacts with community workers and health visitors.

Work in the market town took off and the service was well used. Work with the community centre has been more varied: although the people living there have few geographical restrictions, the reasons they do not access guidance or educational opportunities - the social, personal and confidence barriers - are harder to tackle. As the project has progressed it was felt that the resources and specific higher education guidance expertise would be better utilised by tapping into the referral network of community and guidance workers already operating in those areas.

Work with defined groups
We decided that in addition to focusing on selected geographical areas, we would work with groups of people who might be experiencing particular barriers to education: the project has made links with mental health support groups and women's groups. As well as building up a referral system, the guidance worker has regularly attended drop in sessions and women's centres. This flexible approach has also generated a demand for guidance:

> *It worked eventually by [the guidance worker's] flexibility and commitment – also her accessibility for people wanting to access and re-access her and her skills and advice* (Mental health group)

Existing learners
Another target group included those on Access courses within further education; guidance was offered in a variety of different ways. Once again, it proved important to liaise closely with those within the institution who were already providing support. Most of the local further education colleges were visited; the services offered to students on Access courses and those at the pre-entry stage ranged from formal presentations to both quick and formal interviews. It was clear that despite the good support that Access students receive from their colleges, many still have great need for guidance and support at this stage:

> *Sometimes you need an uninterested party, someone with no emotional involvement, to bat ideas off.* (Access student)

Work with employees

One requirement of the project was to work with low paid employees and some interesting contacts were made with employers. These include a meeting with a group from small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) via a spin off from a Lifelong Learning Partnership, and working with a local catering company that included letters promoting the work with pay slips; this latter generated a number of enquiries. In another case a local council to allowed me to undertake interviews with staff on their premises.

Evaluation of the service

The evaluation of the service had two elements: feedback from clients and feedback from community groups. During the guidance process, clients were asked if they were happy to be contacted for feedback and, if appropriate, were sent an evaluation form.

All clients indicated that they had found the service accessible and that it had supported them in their career and learning decisions.

Established community groups were asked if they were aware of the service and of the impact it had had on their users. All community and IAG contacts indicated that they found the service accessible and useful for their clients. One group commented on its positive impact, noting that it is:

> *confidence-building to have a proper contact at UCW who is constantly available and able to get information.*

There was further benefit to the university. The post holder was placed within Student Services and the value of the contacts and cross referrals between Careers, Welfare, and Counselling have been obvious. In addition, there has been liaison between Admissions, Equal Opportunities, Academic Departments and the Widening Participation Unit. The post holder has representation on a variety of internal groups including the Widening Participation Task Group and also attends Student Information and Guidance meetings. Through such vehicles it has been possible to inform policy on a range of pre-entry issues.

Conclusions

During this project, issues have emerged relating to working with the community in general and to identifying the barriers some groups have in returning to education. In respect of guidance in the community, it is clear that it takes time and perseverance to establish a guidance presence. The needs of the community are many and varied and it is essential to work alongside community partners. The effect of impartial guidance will lead to a more positive view of higher education in general, and the host institution in particular.

Access barriers can range from geographical distance, poor transport links and family commitments to changing timetables and study commitments. Students unable to access the university regularly still require a range of academic, personal, and careers support, some of this at the pre-entry stage. For example, it would be helpful if more detailed and accurate information about financial implications and timetabling were available on request very early in the application process. The project has contributed a mechanism whereby the pre-entry needs of adults can be communicated to the institution, and thus can contribute to the discussion about pre-entry needs as an essential part of the student life cycle.

The Way Forward

The University has recognized the value of this work; it has provided not only a means of enabling people to become more aware of opportunities in higher education but also given voice to those people who have not yet applied and may not make it through the barriers to the point of application. The institution has given a commitment to continue the work, and is looking at ways to integrate and further develop the role.

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International Students and the Inequality of Opportunity

Siobhan Qadir

Last week, during my regular drop in advice session at one of UCE's campuses, I saw an international student. Now, there is nothing incredible or out of the ordinary in this. Indeed, during the last four years the numbers of international students has risen rapidly on the campuses of UK Universities. As UCE Student Job Shop Manager I have seen the numbers of international students using our service grow and with it, some of their expectations have dropped.

My student was about to underline this point to me. She, like many other students, was looking for part time work. Simply put, she needed the income. What this student was looking for was bar work or perhaps even a job at McDonalds, but she was not keen on either role so I discussed other options that might be available to her. She then articulated something that many international students feel:

> *I feel that I can only get bar work or cafe work. It seems to me that no one seems to want you if you have an accent; I'm just being realistic.*

Please do not assume that I am snobbish about students doing bar work. Indeed, I am well acquainted with this work and the benefits. Students can develop a range of employability skills including time management, use of initiative and communication and team working skills. They are dealing in customer service, handling cash, problem solving and even stock control.

My reservation is that the pay for this type of work is not as great as for other part time work opportunities. The hours may suit many students but there are limited opportunities for most to develop professionally. There will always be stories of the student who started in bar work and ended up manager but for most this is not the career path they will make, or even want to.

Meanwhile, my student was sitting in front of me with a copy of her CV, and I could see that it would certainly do her no favours in the UK market. There was little information and it was poorly presented. Despite her low expectations, the student was in fact a designer with some seriously impressive work experience: ten years of working at a senior level. Birmingham has many design companies so why was she not considering applying to them? She expressed reluctance to do this but was prepared to listen to my suggestion that we re-vamp her CV. Throughout the session the student remained pessimistic.

Herein lies the crux of the matter. We are trying to offer an equality of opportunity to all students but the opportunities are not in anyway equal. In fact they seem positively stacked against the international student. Employers do not want to take them on. Indeed there seems to be a fear that they will be in some way acting illegally. The DFES 'red' leaflet, *International students working in the UK*, is a good tool but for many employers it simply does not go far enough. The complexity of the creation of National Insurance numbers is one area that puts more employers off than any other. A student cannot get a National Insurance number without a job yet how many employers look at a temporary number and baulk? Here they have a student claiming that the National Insurance number they have created is perfectly legal (i.e. T & N for temporary number and then their date of birth in a six figure format and then M or F to indicate gender. It is the student that creates this number and demonstrates its authenticity by showing their passport to the employer, complete with letter from their university indicating that they are a student on a full time course. The red guide does not mention this. Also how many employers will ask to see the student's visa stamp and then get confused at the comment on the stamp: *by the consent of Secretary of State?*

If your average small employer is difficult to convince then why not try an agency? Well, more often than not agencies appear even more confused on visa status. I have to deal with many confused, and angry, students complaining they have been told to get a work permit so they can take a part time job. Again, agencies want something official in writing and will complain that the letter supplied is not sufficient. There are also problems with agencies that want a work-based reference but refuse to accept a referee from outside of the UK.

With most agencies it is a question of presenting the information clearly and concisely. Many, when provoked, will contact their head office for clarification and others are well-informed and happy to help, but information is not shared out equally and new staff may have gaps in their knowledge. I always recommend students use Recruitment and Employment Confederation qualified agencies as they are trained and have access to the REC's employment law and legal advisers. But it does not end there!

For jobs within banks and airports there is a requirement for three to five year checkable histories, but these checks cannot cover countries beyond the EU. So, we try to be enthusiastic and talk about employability to international students and they get more and more frustrated. Security checks have to be undertaken and it is not discriminatory if they are being applied to home students too. Or is it? So, what exactly can we be doing to empower these students? The next sections outline some of the approaches that we have taken.

Employer links
Creating effective links with local employers and agencies has been one of our strategies at UCE, and we have tried a number of approaches:

- by setting up agency fairs and other on-campus events we have raised our profile both on and off the campus;
- we advertise the services that we can offer to employers and agencies and raise the issue of using international students. As part of this we inform them of the legal requirements and how they can meet them;
- by being pro-active and being prepared to talk to worried employers we can use our limited powers effectively;
- by developing specific leaflets for employers we can tackle their questions.

Some services that have guides for international students have created a version for employers that lists what they need to check for in terms of visa stamps and gives them the facts, figures and contact details that they need. These must always be clear, effective and completely jargon free.

Student support
By arming students with handouts and leaflets that detail the legal situation we empower them. Perhaps your University might run CV and application sessions specifically for international students. Clear job information and advice on employment prospects after graduation is also important.

Tutor Links
It is also vital to get the message out to tutors so that they are fully aware of the facts so as to avoid giving erroneous information to students. Most Universities are very clear as to who can give advice to international students but tutors still try to offer pearls of wisdom too. By contacting heads of faculties you can hope the information trickles down. Students will always turn first to tutors and if they do not know or are unclear of the advice they can and cannot give or to whom to re- direct the student then major problems can arise. Leaflets created for employers and students can be adapted for tutors. You may like to set up email groups to feed latest news to and field questions from academics.

All of this may seem like hard work but once in place such frameworks will ease workloads. You will be helping to get the message out within your institution and so ease the pressure and feeling of helplessness that many international students experience. In doing this, you will also avoid serious problems and misinformation. Remember, happy students turn into happy graduates and these are our greatest marketing tool of all.

And what about my student? She returned to tell me she had got a job in a bar near her home. I cannot help thinking that this was a lost opportunity for us all.

Further information and resources

International Students Working in the UK (DfES): http://www.dfes.gov.uk/international-students/wituk.shtml.

UKCOSA (the Council for International Education): http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/.

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Orientation for New Entrants: a Project Management Approach

Sharon McNeish

Context

This article is about one institution's approach to managing and improving the new entrant experience. It is written to offer a way forward for student support staff who may have found themselves excluded from playing an active part in the design or implementation of such processes, or who have been confronted with the familiar territorial divide between the 'centre' and academic departments or faculties. The starting point is that the new entrant need never know who was responsible for the opportunities that are offered in those early days. Their interest is in the transition they make as they enter the institution. Our collective duty is to ensure that transition is smooth and meaningful. A project management approach focuses attention on the student experience and at the same time helps tackle the organisational cultural issues that so often take up too much time.

Introduction

Three years ago the responsibility for student induction was moved from the Student Recruitment and Admission Service to the Student and Staff Support Division. It was decided that a project management approach was the most appropriate way forward. Involving cross-institutional input in planning, implementing and evaluating the *Orientation Programme for New Entrants* has been effective. Incremental improvements are being successfully introduced each year, new entrant feedback is positive, and importantly, colleagues across the University have found a forum for sharing best practice.

Review, planning and design

The work begins in late February with a review and planning meeting. This is an informal event that brings together colleagues from services, faculties, graduate schools, Advisers of Studies and those with student retention interests. The event is an information-sharing opportunity and a time for discussion on the wider issues such as the student experience and student retention. Part of the challenge has been to make up the invitation list. With people changing jobs, an out of date telephone directory and a range of job titles that are not always informative, it can be difficult to be sure that the list of contacts is correct. There is one guarantee: staff will tell you when you have got it wrong!

The primary focus is on results from the web-based survey that is undertaken during October and November each year (see below). However, we also use the opportunity to run facilitated brainstorming sessions on what we are trying to achieve for future orientation events. We invite faculty colleagues who have tried something new to come forward to share their successes; for example, our Social Sciences Faculty customised their 2002 Faculty Induction session and we felt that this advance was worth sharing. Apart from the obvious advantage of sharing best practice, our long-term hope is that such initiatives will encourage greater standardisation of provision across our faculties. It also helps us all link our orientation work to the larger questions of wider participation and student retention.

Following the review and planning meeting, we gather together volunteers from across the institution to join the Co-ordinating Team. It is true that we have to persuade and encourage volunteers from faculties, but each year those who have come forward have said how much they have learned about the process, and the scale of the task. The Students' Representative Council has always been involved, and sometimes there has also been mature student representation.

The design phase usually takes about three months. The most important starting point for the Co-ordinating Team is that we endeavour to think from different students' perspectives: for example, a return to study student, a mature student perhaps with family responsibilities, a school leaver, and a students who is a parent. In doing this, we have tried to stop presenting our materials and information in term of organisational structures, and we have made our sessions and terminology much more understandable and accessible.

We are particularly pleased with the way we have responded to different student segments by designing and delivering specific events for them. Having student input on our team helps the creative process enormously. Some sessions that perhaps we would never have dreamed of have emerged, including special events for dyslexic students, and Saturday morning events for students with children. These latter are held in the sports facilities and while mum or dad attend a study skills session with an Effective Learning Adviser, our colleagues in the Sport and Recreation Service lead the children in play in the gym.

We also run a series of bespoke events for mature students; these were the result of two studies undertaken by our Divisional Researcher. We know from a part-time employment survey (Carney and McNeish under review) that juggling a range of family responsibilities, part-time work and university study is particularly challenging. Students in this situation do not want to spend a week socialising, but would prefer to get started quickly; they also want the University to appreciate the sacrifices they have made to come to study. From our Mature Student Survey, we know they want practical information on workload, note-taking, study skills and funding.

Our work complements that undertaken by our colleagues in the Widening Participation Service. Since 1999 the University has been a major contributor to the GOALS (Greater Opportunity of Learning and Access with Schools) project. The GOALS project involves all seven Higher Education Institutions in the West of Scotland, 44 secondary schools with low participation in Higher Education and their 255 primary feeders. It operates in all years of the school curriculum from Primary 6 through to Secondary 6. The University of Glasgow has particular responsibility for the Top-Up element of GOALS which provides a transition course for pupils in S5 and S6 who have applied for a university place. The Student Network was born from this programme of work. The Network is made up of student volunteers who assist new entrants in their transition from school or college to University. They run various events within the Orientation Programme for New Entrants, and beyond in the Extended Programme (see below). The volunteers provide support and information for new entrants who may be finding the transition a challenge.

For the first time last year we offered generic events for postgraduate students, exploring issues such as being a postgraduate and supervisor expectations. Working together with representatives from our Postgraduate Club we began to help postgraduates find a central locus of information and support. This work supplements that of our Graduate Schools and in the future we hope to do more to help support their students.

One aspect of our work attempts to target entrants before they arrive, and over the last couple of years we have designed an Orientation Web site for New Entrants. In 2002, we made a concerted effort to make this much more customised, and one of our MSc IT students took on the project. User requirements were captured through interviewing secondary school pupils about their expectations. As a result, the layout of the pages was changed and the site's navigation greatly improved. Through this process, we have a much more user-friendly source of information that allows entrants to begin to plan their arrival in advance.

Communicating with staff and students involved in design and planning is a challenge and this year we are trying something new: the Orientation Communication web site. We hope this will act as a vehicle for sharing information and ideas. We also feel this will help the Co-ordinating Team become more accessible to everyone, and are encouraging colleagues to send us feedback forms with their suggestions.

Implementation

As soon as the induction booklet is at the printers (June), we begin the detailed implementation phase. This involves putting names to key events and talking about presentation materials. Everyone will appreciate the logistics of this phase, especially when you consider that our 2002 Programme ran for eleven consecutive days. Weekend provision is less extensive but some of the most popular special events for mature students have been held on Saturday mornings. We know that their time at weekends is more flexible, and we know they want to get started and are keen to attend sessions on note taking and other study skills.

As soon as the main programme ends, we begin what we call the Extended Programme. We have a lot more work to do on this but we are gradually encouraging colleagues to repeat the most popular Orientation Programme sessions throughout the year. These events (for example, sessions on part-time work and employment) are grafted onto the on-going work of services such as Student Learning Service and the Careers Service. The Extended Programme is an integral part of another project we have underway. Colleagues from the July 2002 AMOSSHE Conference will already have heard about our One Stop Shop that provides not just centralised registry functions but is geared to centralising on-going support.

Evaluation and further developments

One essential element of our project management approach is evaluating when we are doing things right and determining where improvements are to be made. Our means of evaluation is a web-based survey covering all aspects of the programme and the new entrant experience. Our simple yet effective mechanism is to email a questionnaire directly to all new entrants four weeks after their arrival. Modest incentives (for example, free annual membership to the Sport and Recreation Service) have encouraged a doubling of the response rate in the last year (16% of 5,000+ students). Purists may say this is not that outstanding, but we are nonetheless pleased with this response rate and we feel we glean a lot of good information to help us design the following year's programme. It also provides the one formal route for colleagues to receive praise for the effort they put into this work. In publishing an executive summary in the Staff Newsletter and sending the results to the Principal and other senior officers, we raise the profile of our objectives and our achievements.

So have we made a difference to the organisation of the programme? We feel the project management approach provides us with an annual, interactive process that helps co-ordinate a diverse range of interests. It helps us endorse the concept that orientation is much more than event management. All of us are learning that induction is just one significant phase of the student lifecycle. Working together at this stage helps build more effective relationships and trust for the work we continue with through the year. We also want to consolidate and develop our Extended Programme. Our continuing challenge is to build trust in a new way of doing things. We want to highlight to colleagues the advantages to students and themselves of reducing the organisational silos and building greater integration between the specialist services.

Conclusions

In two years we have managed to bring more focus to what we provide for new entrants. We also have valuable management information on the early student experience that is pooled centrally, and shared across the institution. We have more to do in segmentation and customising communications to entrants. By seeking out best practice from the USA and Australia we believe we will enable the University of Glasgow to maintain a competitive advantage. We have forged strong links with some of the most forward-thinking international institutions and will continue to learn from their example.

The project management process has still not brought everyone on board. Only this year we were asked if we had any evidence to suggest that our approach works. Our answer was that we have more evidence than we had three years ago. We have management information that helps us introduce improvements and we have a process that allows us greater joined up thinking. Most importantly, we have a framework that helps to customise our provision for new entrants. And we all know that the students' interests come before our own don't we?

NB: This paper reflects the situation in Spring 2003.

Reference

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The 2003 NASPA/AMOSSHE Exchange Visit

Sue Yates

The first NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education)/AMOSSHE exchange visit took place in early summer 2003 when four AMOSSHE members visited the United States. Ken Hopkins (Kingston), Steve Page (Hull), Selena Springbett (Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College) and Sue Yates (Sussex) visited five colleges in Florida with a general brief to explore a comparison of the nature, scope and definition of student services in the two countries.

The exchange took place in May in the immediate aftermath of the war, when the nature of the 'special relationship' was very much on all of our minds. Our perception was that the UK was more European than American in terms of the development of student services, but that as in so many other areas of life the inexorable movement would be towards the US model. So we were intrigued by the prospect of discovering how the two countries currently compared and the extent to which the role of student services in the US represented our future.

The four of us were from fairly dissimilar institutions in terms of history, mission and size and we were going to visit five colleges in Florida that also represented quite a diverse range of institutions. As well investigating the role of student services, we were also looking at a number of specific issues including web-based services, monitoring and progression in respect of disabled students and race relations.

Our visit started at Rollins College, a small privately funded institution near Orlando, whence we moved on to the University of Tampa. Both these institutions were predominantly undergraduate and privately funded, with superb facilities and a very strong customer focus. Most notable, from our point of view, was the primacy of student services within the organisation; this was small wonder once we realised the profound effect of good retention on the financial bottom line. The withdrawal of any student from Rollins or Tampa has a significant financial impact, a fact that would not be lost on any member of the organisation; this was inevitably reflected in the status and position of student services. Any differences there were between the four of us from the UK that derived from our particular institutional perspectives dissolved in the face of this signal difference: we were all poor relations indeed.

The gulf between us and the US began to narrow as our trip progressed. We visited, all too briefly, Santa Fe Community College which has a strong and impressive mission in respect of social inclusion, particularly in relation to the black community. Then we moved to the University of Florida; this university, with its mixed economy and research culture, made better sense to us than Rollins and Tampa. Our final destination, Florida State, felt almost familiar once we had put aside the giant football stadium, the bountiful and delicious food, the well-maintained buildings and the rest.

Our trip across the state of Florida gave us a remarkable overview of the US higher education system and while the institutions did differ - in some cases markedly - from one another, a number of similarities and common features did emerge. One of these was the political position of student services. Leaving aside the obvious advantage derived from the dependence upon high fee paying students, as at Rollins and Tampa, there is more generally a strong sense of the equal weight within the organisation given to the role and function of student services staff. This is evidenced by the fact that Student Affairs is headed up by a Vice-President and owes much to the professional status of student services staff; this latter is reflected in both their titles and their pay. Coming from a culture where, to caricature somewhat and in the words of Ken Hopkins our 'team leader', student services staff are viewed as some kind of servant breed doing necessary but rather low-grade housekeeping-type chores, this could not but be a source of envy.

Underpinning this status is the fact that student affairs in higher education is a recognised profession, able to set its own entry requirements and standards and also to participate in the delivery of education and professional training, hence the army of graduate assistants that comprises such a high proportion of employees. These are postgraduate students, some on programmes connected to student affairs administration, who undertake a range of roles within student services and other areas. Their presence has a significant impact on the culture of the student affairs departments: meetings can feel almost like colloquia and the daily business sometimes has the feel of an academic enterprise. There are obvious attractions to this – not least that it provides student services with a cadre of bright, keen energetic and cheap workers, many of whom appear happy, indeed eager, to act as general gofers; everyone should have one. But, for the time being at least, this is something to envy but probably not to emulate.

Things to envy but also to emulate are the web-based and electronic services; in general all the institutions we visited are ahead of us in term of smart-card development. These cards can be used for buildings access, meals and the launderette as well as as a credit and ID card. One particularly impressive, and internationally well-known, development at Florida State is a web-based careers portfolio. This is a form of progress file that the University is committed to maintaining for the life-time of the student. Careers services generally are way out of our league in terms of their profile within the institution and the level of resources provided to them; this was not a great surprise.

What is perhaps more surprising, given the relatively recent introduction of disability legislation in this country, is the fact that the US does not appear to be significantly ahead of us in provision for disabled students. Whilst our assistive technology is less embedded across the university than was the case in the US, the technology itself is very similar, and in general we seem to be in much the same position regarding physical and other access. This can be summarised as making good progress, but with plenty of room for improvement.

A further example of the academic dimension to student affairs is a strong emphasis on assessment and evaluation. Some services employ full-time researchers, and the tools and instruments employed in surveying, assessing and monitoring services and the student experience is an industry in itself. First Year Experience (FYE) Programmes also provide a link between student affairs and academia. Many of us are now placing much greater emphasis on induction and the first year experience, partly as a response to the widening participation agenda, but in the US, student affairs staff are directly involved in the delivery of the first year experience programmes. These are offered variously as credit-bearing, elective or required programmes, in some cases for all, in others for self-selected or targeted groups of first year students. The first year experience is a whole area of professional practice in its own right and the impact of FYE programmes on retention rates is, unsurprisingly, reported to be very significant.

Again in the area of induction, another well-established practice, which is one to neither envy nor emulate - at least in my view - is the parents' induction programme. This takes place over a whole weekend and is aimed at assisting parents in the process of letting go; not one to volunteer for.

One thing that was apparent at all the colleges we visited, and struck us all, is the strong sense of mission within student affairs. This goes way beyond the provision of services to embrace a whole moral agenda. What we picked up was a strong moral anxiety concerning the values of the wider society, notably the breakdown of the family, rampant materialism and the moral vacuum inhabited by young people in the US. Higher education appears to be seen, certainly by student affairs staff, as providing the one opportunity, to be seized or lost forever, to instil a sense of social obligation and personal responsibility. This is expressed continually in terms of citizenship and leadership. This moral crusade, of which Student Affairs appears to be at the forefront, was quite alien to us and quite troubling in many respects. What it undoubtedly does, however, is provide a sense of wider purpose, amounting almost to a sense of vocation amongst the staff, something we could not lay claim to.

A feature of student life in the US which absorbs a considerable amount of staff time and energy, is under-age drinking (the legal age is 21). The universities appear to devote an inordinate amount of resource to the policing of illicit alcohol consumption, without noticeable effect. Another area of activity requiring their earnest attention is 'Greek life', the behaviours and activities that are associated with fraternities and sororities known by letters of the Greek alphabet. Their prevalence is apparently more marked in the southern states than elsewhere in the US and the relationships between them and their institutions is clearly an uneasy and ambiguous one. Dedicated student affairs staff members are responsible for managing Greek life, the view being that it is best to encompass fraternities and sororities within the organisational structure, where they can be more readily monitored and controlled. However, there are clearly aspects of Greek life, notably its exclusivity and indulgence in arcane rituals, that were troubling to staff; it was clear that some of them were unwilling to air their misgivings publicly, at least in the presence of visitors from the UK.

A very notable feature of the US university system that is by no means restricted to student services is the prevalence of the work ethic and the extent to which the demands of the organisation dominate life. We were particularly impressed by one head of accommodation who was proud of the 'quality time' he spent with his family at the end of each working day, that is between 5 and 7 pm, before returning to the office. We were also very taken with the head of one counselling service who was treating insomniac students by going into their dorm at midnight, in his pyjamas, to talk about their concerns. Naturally we were all very keen to get home and share this good practice with our counselling colleagues.

So what else did we learn? It would be unfair and untrue to characterise student services in the UK as amateur, but we could not escape the conclusion that there is much scope for greater professionalism in respect of many of our activities. There is also scope for increased professionalisation of the role of student services staff. Taught doctorates in student affairs are unlikely to be our way, but we should continue to demand qualifications in the areas within student affairs and we must continue to strengthen and enhance AMOSSHE's commitment to on-going professional development and training. Whilst we can be encouraged by the fact that student affairs are becoming more highly valued in the UK, we can learn much about both service development and political positioning from our US colleagues.

Are we more like the rest of Europe than we are the US? Probably we are, at least in many respects and for the moment, but in truth our overwhelming feeling was of being English. The most extreme manifestation of this was our demands for tea; these became increasingly obsessive, strident and downright unreasonable. In that respect, we were bad guests.

Our hosts, on the other hand, were superb. The hospitality and generosity of everyone we met were simply awesome. We are deeply grateful to them all and to NASPA and AMOSSHE for organizing the visit. However, while it was excellent to be given such a comprehensive overview, the programme was very packed and we would have benefited from having a little more space to reflect on our experiences as we went along. Finally, a word of advice for future exchange visitors - insist on direct flights. But that is another story altogether.

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forum in which to take stock in a truly international context. The NASPA conference is an experience I would definitely recommend to colleagues. More information about NASPA may be found at www.naspa.org.

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Some reflections on the NASPA International Symposium and Conference 2003

Andrew West

AMOSSHE colleagues will probably be aware that NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) is one of two national professional associations in the USA relating to student services functions. NASPA's annual conference is a huge affair attracting some 4000 delegates and this article aims to present a number of key reflections based on my participation in the 2003 NASPA International Symposium and also the 2003 Annual Conference, both held in St Louis, Missouri in late March 2003.

The International Symposium was a packed two-day programme of presentations, round-table events, networking sessions and discussion groups. The overall theme of *Borders, Barriers and Bridges* was an attempt to draw out from colleagues some of the key issues that are common to all those working in the field of student affairs, as well as topics which are clearly specific to a particular national context. Given the fascinating mix among participants, who included student services managers from South Africa, Bulgaria, the Russian Federation and the United Arab Emirates, it was not surprising that there were some distinct surface differences. What was perhaps more remarkable were the common themes which emerged, among them concerns relating to participation levels in Higher Education and approaches to access strategies, developments in student funding and support systems, student 'wellness' issues (including responses to mental ill-health), and a dominating imperative to ensure best value and effective targeting in student services provision. This set in the context of normally increasing customer expectations and often reducing resources.

The main conference theme, *Gathering at the Gateway - renewing our spirit* was both a reference to the gateway city of St Louis, which has traditionally been a meeting point for diverse cultures, and also a reflection on re-energising in post September 11th America. The conference programme, which was made up of around three hundred different workshops (not counting plenary sessions, keynote speakers and a wide range of regional groupings and receptions), enabled participants to determine their own themed track through a huge diversity of topics.

On the basis of their relevance to developments in my own institution, I mainly selected sessions concerned with on-line delivery of student services and customer evaluation systems. In relation to on-line services, the presentations were extremely helpful in pointing a way forward for potential projects here, given the far greater development of these facilities over recent years in the US. I was particularly heartened by the experience of one large and prestigious state institution that, having implemented a wide range of self-service on-line facilities, is finding its student services staff being increasingly freed up from routine processing tasks in order to concentrate on the development of value-added services for student groups and supporting individual students.

In respect of student evaluation, I gained some useful background on generalised evaluation tools, including the national *College student experiences questionnaire*. These are used by many US institutions and might well be informing thinking as we grapple in the UK with new requirements for student evaluation systems, including the national proposals for a standardised student survey.

One key preoccupation of the delegates seemed to me to be ever increasing professionalisation within student administration and student support. In this context, it was interesting to hear a keynote speech from a former student services manager, turned university President, encouraging delegates to set their career sights high, reassuring them that their background and training made them eminently suited to the role of university leader.

I have to say that the sheer scale of the main conference made it difficult to engage much with other delegates, though the smaller pre-conference Symposium was an excellent

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Guidelines for Authors

Articles and reports on a wide range of topics related to student affairs are welcomed for submission to the *Journal of Student Services in Higher Education*. Articles may range from comment and debate on major policy issues to analytical descriptions of current practice or reports on research undertaken. Contributions should be written for a broad audience that includes both those working within student services and those outside the immediate sector but with an interest in student affairs.

The *Journal* will accept the following types of contribution:

- papers (2000 to 6000 words)
- shorter contributions (1000 to 2000 words)
- conference reports (up to 2000 words)
- book reviews (up to 1000 words).

Exceptions should be discussed with the editor(s) prior to submission. Those wishing to offer book reviews or conference reports should first check with the editors to ensure that such contributions have not already been accepted from other authors.

Manuscript preparation and submission

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in both hard copy and electronic form. Hard copies should be double spaced, with at least 3 cm left and right margins, and include page numbers. Electronic copies should be formatted in Microsoft Word. Please use simple formatting, avoiding the use of tabs, underlining or bold typeface. Submission by e-mail attachment is preferred.

2. The author's name, professional affiliation, and email address should be included at the end of all contributions.

3. Articles should avoid technical or specialist detail and jargon. All acronyms should be defined the first time that they are used. Language should be gender neutral and non-discriminatory.

4. Please avoid the excessive use of verbatim quotations such as personal comments and extracts from other publications. The focus of the article should be analytical rather than just descriptive.

5. All sources, including reports and websites, should be fully referenced using the Harvard reference system. Author(s) and date should be given within the text as in the following examples:

    One study (Jones 1998) has claimed that these factors are related, but Smith (2002) has refuted this argument. Further work by White and Green (2003) and a later study of a much larger group (Khan et al. 2004) have confirmed Jones' original findings.

    If the reference is to a specific section of a publication please include the page number(s) using the following format: (Jones 1998, 14).

6. Add a full list of references at the end of the main text; the reference list should be in alphabetical order and formatted as in the following examples:

    Jones, J. 1998: A study of the impact of term-time working on student achievement. *Journal of Student Success* 6, 7-15.

    Khan, M., Munro, T., Perez, A. and White, F. 2004: *A Longitudinal Study of Student Responses to Financial Difficulties*. London: Student Services Press.

    Smith, P. 2002: Student debt. In D. Peters, *Students in the 21st Century*. London: Student Services Press, 56-73.

    References to web sites should include the date when they were accessed in brackets at the end of the reference:

    White, F. and Green, T. 2003: Why do students work? The Student Services e-Journal 3.
    http://www.anywhere.ac.uk/students/journal/volume3
    (31 March 2004).

    Web resources without an obvious author should be referenced as follows:

    The student website.
    http://www.anywhere.ac.uk/services/resources
    (5 April 2006).

Manuscript review

All major contributions will be sent for comment to the Journal's peer review panel. Authors should indicate whether or not they would like such review to be anonymous. If strict anonymity is requested, please submit a second version of the article with any identifying features, such as references to specific institutions, removed. Otherwise the editors will merely remove the author's name prior to review by members of the panel.

Shorter contributions, conference reports and book reviews may be accepted by the editorial panel without further review. The editors may request that changes are made to any article submitted prior to formal acceptance for publication. The editors reserve the right to make editorial changes, but except in the case of small changes, such as those required to conform to the Journal's house style, the author's permission will be sought prior to publication. Decisions relating to publication will be communicated to authors as quickly as possible, and within a period of no more than 3 months from submission.

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