

## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**Communication Title:** Interim report from the Student Charter Task and Finish Group

**Purpose of Communication:** In March 2011 UUK and NUS published joint guidance on the development of student charters by HEIs. In response to this Education Committee established a Task and Finish Group to draft a University statement that would fulfil the expectation that all HEIs had a document of this type, but which took full account of the University's distinctive approach to educational provision. This paper proposes a draft of such a document, and feedback is now being sought across the University on this draft. The intention is to consult widely on the draft, following which all feedback will be considered with a view to final recommendations being made to the December 2011 meeting of Education Committee and the January 2012 meeting of Senate.

**Consultation to date:** The draft statement has been considered by the Task and Finish Group, Education Committee and UEC prior to its circulation across the University.

**Action Requested:** This document should be considered by Faculty Education Committees, Faculty Boards, boards of studies, Colleges' Board and DSU Council, and feedback provided to the Task and Finish Group. Departments can also provide feedback directly if they wish to do so (any such submissions should be no longer than two pages of A4 in length). The draft will also be made available to all members of the University via the University website, with individual comments invited.

**Deadline for action/response required:** Feedback on this paper should be sent to Richard Harrison by 5.00 pm on 18 November 2011.

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# Interim report from the Student Charter Task and Finish Group

## Background

1. In the spring of 2010 the Department for Business Innovation and Skills established a joint working group with Universities UK and the NUS to consider current and best practice in the use of student charters by HEIs, and 'to develop an outline student charter which can be used to inform a new basic standard and develop good practice across all English HEIs'. This group reported in March 2011, recommending that 'each HEI should have a Student Charter – or similar high level statement – to set out the mutual expectations of universities and students' (the full report is available at <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/s/11-736-student-charter-group.pdf> ). Following the report's publication the Minister of State for Higher Education urged those HEIs that did not already have a Student Charter to use the report (and the guidance contained within it) to develop such a Charter.
2. In response to this Education Committee established a Student Charter Task and Finish Group. This Group, which includes representatives from DSU, each of the University's faculties, the Colleges' Division and the Academic Office, has met on two occasions. A draft document has been developed and the Task and Finish Group and feedback is now being sought on this. The draft is attached as **Annex 1**. Also attached for reference are the principles for student charters (**Annex 2**), and suggested topics for inclusion in student charters (**Annex 3**), included in the UUK/NUS report.

## Approach

3. Having considered the UUK/NUS report, and examples of existing student charters at research intensive universities in both the UK and US, the Task and Finish Group came to the view that the University needed to develop a high-level document that took as its starting point the institutional values set out in the University Strategy, and the way that these have been articulated within the University's Education Strategy. In particular the emphasis on a student-centred approach to education, and the role that both students and staff play in the University's academic community, have been particularly influential in guiding the Group's work.
4. Consequently the draft attached as Annex 1 is not framed as a Student Charter that amounts to a service level agreement between the University and its students. Instead the Group have developed a Statement of the responsibilities of University membership. This approach is based on the belief that all members of the University are part of an academic community, and that membership of this community confers responsibilities on all its members (both staff and students). The Group believe that this approach recognises the partnership between staff and students that is at the heart of a Durham education, at the same time that it acknowledges that different parts of the community have different responsibilities. The Group believes that this approach builds on and strengthens the institutional values contained in the University Strategy, the Education Strategy and other documents, and in preparing the draft at Annex 1 the Group has consciously drawn heavily on these and other extant strategies and policy statements. The Statement of responsibilities of University membership therefore draws together key values and commitments, while also signposting readers to additional sources of information relating to these.
5. The UUK/NUS guidance proposes that student charters should be reviewed annually by HEIs and their student unions, in order to maintain currency and validity. The Group are fully committed to this principle, and propose that the responsibility for this review should rest with Education Committee reporting through to Senate. It believes that this process will be supported by ensuring that the Statement is also embedded within a core University process to ensure that the full value of the document is realised. The Group's view is that the Statement should therefore become a key reference point in the

development and implementation of the forthcoming (2012/13 and thereafter) week-long induction process for new students. The Statement should be used by departments, colleges and professional support services as a key reference point for the induction they provide. The essence of induction is to induct new students into the University community, and a clear understanding of the responsibilities of community membership should be integral to any effective induction process.

### **Current consultation process**

6. In order to be a useful and effective document, the final version of the Statement needs to reflect a common, shared understanding across all members of the University involved in educational provision. The Group are therefore conducting an extensive consultation process, which seeks opinions from as broad a range of staff as possible. The consultation process includes:
  - a. Consideration of the draft at key faculty and institutional committees (Senate, Faculty Education Committees, Faculty Boards, Heads of College, Senior Tutors' Committee, Bursars' Committee, College Councils) with members of Education Committee serving on these committees being asked to lead these discussions.
  - b. Consideration of the draft within DSU's deliberative structures, led and co-ordinated by the President of DSU.
  - c. Discussion of the draft at boards of studies, with chairs of Faculty Education Committees being asked to present the draft to boards of studies and facilitate the discussions.
  - d. Discussion of the draft with staff within colleges, with Senior Tutors being asked to facilitate this.
  - e. Discussion of the draft with senior managers in the Registrar's and Treasurer's divisions, facilitated by the Academic Registrar and the secretary to the Task and Finish Group.
  - f. Making available a web form to allow those members of staff who wish to do so to comment individually.

The consultation process is being co-ordinated by the chair and secretary to the Task and Finish Group.

7. The intention is that this consultation process will continue until the middle of the Michaelmas Term 2011 with a view to all responses being received by the Group in time for it to consider these before agreeing a final draft Statement for consideration at the December 2011 Education Committee and subsequently by Senate and Council.

### **Action requested**

8. Colleagues are asked to consider and comment on the proposed statement in Annex 1.

## **Annex 1                      Draft Statement of responsibilities of University membership**

### **The University's academic community**

1. Durham University is an academic community (composed of all its staff, students and alumni), committed to the academic freedom, critical thinking and creativity that are essential to the development and communication of knowledge. All members of the University are part of this community, and have expectations of and responsibilities to that community and to each other.
2. Students and staff have distinctive but complementary roles within the University community (whether in academic departments, colleges or professional support services) leading to different responsibilities, but as members of the same community they work together within available resources to realise the full potential of both individuals and the University as a whole. This partnership is based on a shared commitment to value knowledge both for its own sake and for the wider benefits this knowledge brings to individuals, the University and to wider society. These behaviours are characterised by mutual respect between all members of the community, and a strong commitment to supporting and promoting diversity and equality within that community.
3. This partnership is based on the range of responsibilities of students and staff, and builds on the opportunities the University offers to both students and staff. Alongside their responsibilities in respect of education, academic staff are engaged in research and administration, and these activities enrich the educational provision that they offer. The academic obligations of students are complemented by the extensive range of development opportunities that the University offers outside its programmes of study through Durham Students' Union and colleges.

### **Responsibilities of community membership**

#### *Student engagement*

4. Staff will:
  - a. Fully involve students, through their representatives, in decision-making processes relating to educational issues at all levels, from academic departments and colleges through to Senate, and engage with and respond to the issues raised by students.
  - b. Support students taking on representative roles through the provision of training opportunities, working with DSU to do this.
  - c. Involve students in monitoring and reviewing its academic programmes.
  - d. Ensure that where student views have been sought, students receive feedback on the action taken in response.
5. Students will:
  - a. Engage with the range of opportunities provided for student representation, either through serving as a student representative or by raising any issues through their representatives in DSU, colleges and departments.
  - b. When asked for their feedback by the University, reflect on the issues being raised and engage constructively with the consultative process.

#### *Learning, teaching and assessment*

6. Staff will:
  - a. Offer academic programmes that draw on the University's research environment, and which give students themselves the opportunity to engage with research (as

understood in their academic discipline(s)) and thereby develop their critical and analytical abilities.

- b. Ensure that the learning and teaching methods of all academic programmes are effective in supporting students in meeting the expectations of their programme, and developing the capacity of students as independent learners.
  - c. Use methods of assessment that are valid, reliable, equitable and transparent. These methods will assess student achievement in relation to published criteria, and will support students in their learning as well as assessing their achievements.
  - d. Provide students with feedback on their assessed work, according to timescales published at departmental level, to support students in developing their academic capabilities.
  - e. Be appropriately qualified and build on these qualifications to develop and enhance their learning and teaching practice.
  - f. Take full advantage of the learning resources available to them in ways that are appropriate to individual programmes, to deliver and enhance these programmes of study.
  - g. Reflect regularly on programmes, to ensure that that these maintain high academic standards and to identify where and how they can improve the quality of programmes.
7. Students will:
- a. Take responsibility for their own learning, developing their capacity as independent learners.
  - b. Engage fully with the opportunities for learning provided by the University: preparing for and attending timetabled classes; fulfilling all the academic obligations of their programme; engaging in independent study as expected in their programme; and taking advantage of opportunities provided to engage academically outside the formal requirements of their programme.
  - c. Reflect critically on the feedback provided on their assessed work, to develop the ability to learn from past experience and apply these lessons to future activities.

#### *Personal development*

8. Staff will:
- a. Ensure that academic programmes provide students with a wide range of skills that will prepare graduates for further study and/or future employment.
  - b. Make available opportunities for students to reflect on, and record, the skills and abilities they have developed through their academic programmes and extra-curricular activities.
9. Students will:
- a. Engage with the opportunities in their programmes, and through extra-curricular activities to support and reflect on their personal development and to support preparation for work and/or further study.
  - b. Manage their time to ensure an appropriate balance between their commitments to their academic programme and their extra-curricular activities.
10. Students and staff will work together to provide extra-curricular activities (through for example student societies, student common rooms, colleges) that support them in their personal development.

### *Student support*

#### 11. Staff will:

- a. Ensure that all students have a named academic adviser/supervisor, to whom they are known personally, who will be responsible for providing academic support and guidance relating to their programme.
- b. Provide high quality pastoral support to students through colleges and specialist student support services.
- c. Provide students with clear and accurate information that meets their needs. This will include information on their academic programme; learning resources; the University's regulatory framework, including the means by which students can raise complaints and academic appeals; the costs for their programmes, including methods of payment; and of extra-curricular activities.

#### 12. Students will:

- a. Engage fully with the academic support and guidance provided by their departments, attending scheduled meetings with their academic adviser/supervisor.
- b. Identify problems relating to their academic studies promptly to their academic adviser/supervisor or another appropriate member of their academic department.
- c. Seek help for pastoral problems in a timely way from their College Senior Tutor, or the relevant specialist student support services.

#### 13. Staff and DSU will work together to ensure that students have access to specialist advice on financial issues.

### **Further information**

#### 14. The responsibilities detailed above underpin, and are amplified by, a wide range of University policies. These are summarised for undergraduate students in the [Student Survival Guide](#), and for postgraduate students in the [Postgraduate Student Guide](#), which are made available to all students every year. There are also a number of other documents that are based on the principles laid out above:

- a. The University's values and mission are contained in its [Strategy 2010-20](#). Its commitment to mutual respect between all members of its community are supported by its [Diversity and Equality Policy](#), and its [Policy on Respect at Work and Study](#).
- b. The University's commitment to high quality learning, teaching and assessment, and its plans to improve this provision between now and 2015, are detailed in the [University Education Strategy](#). Specific plans to improve postgraduate education are included in the [Postgraduate Strategy](#).
- c. The University's [Principles of Student Engagement](#) lay out its commitment to working with its students, and the detailed policies in [Section 5 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook](#) demonstrate how this commitment is implemented. The work of course representatives is explained in a [Handbook](#) published by DSU.
- d. The key features that all taught programmes should demonstrate are laid out in the University's Principles for the development of the taught curriculum. The key elements of its research degree provision are detailed in its [Code of Practice on Research Degrees](#).
- e. The way in which Durham assesses its academic programmes, and provides feedback to students, is founded on its [Principles of Assessment](#), which inform the detailed assessment policies available in [Section 6 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook](#).

- f. The University's approach to supporting students in developing their skills and enhancing their employability is available in the University's [Employability Statement](#). Extensive information on careers, employability and enterprise issues is available on the website of the [Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre](#).
- g. Durham's commitment to high quality student support is embodied in the University's Principles for Student Support, which underpin the detailed student support arrangements.
- h. The General Regulations that apply to all students of the University are available in [Volume I of the University Calendar](#). Regulations for specific types of programme, and individual programme regulations, are available in [Volume II of the University Calendar](#).
- i. How the University handles situations where students feel that mistakes or errors have been made is detailed on its [Appeals, Complaints and Discipline webpages](#).
- j. The way that the University monitors and enhances the academic standards and quality of its provision is summarised in its [Quality Management Framework](#).

## Annex 2

## UUK/NUS 'Principles for the development, design and use of Student Charters'

### Charter Principles

- Charters are a joint venture with the Students' Union and must involve students and student representatives at the outset.
- This partnership working must continue after development – with joint monitoring and review.
- Joint monitoring and review should occur regularly – at least annually - with the use of other evidence and feedback e.g. student surveys.
- Charters should be signed off by Vice-Chancellors and Students' Union's Presidents. Senior staff should demonstrate buy-in at strategic committees, e.g. Learning and Teaching Committees.
- Communication and dissemination of charters needs careful thought, so that they are accessible by all students and staff.
- Charters should be for all staff and should engage and involve all student facing staff.
- Charters should be for all students, covering both undergraduates and postgraduates.
- The main focus should be on current students – for induction and during their time in higher education.
- Charters should be clear on their purpose, acting as a front page, with links included to more detailed information in university regulations and course handbooks.
- So should be kept as short as possible – suggest 2 pages maximum.
- It should be clear what a charter is not. It is not a detailed personal agreement or contract.
- A charter should communicate the ethos of the institution.
- The emphasis should be on partnership working between staff and students.

## **Annex 3                    UUK/NUS ‘Topics and issues Student Charters might cover’**

1. We recommend a high level, succinct document – e.g. 2 pages.
2. We recommend 3 parts – HEI, students, Students’ Union.
3. Each HEI should review the following ‘checklist’ with its Students’ Union – to decide whether these topics should be included in their charter:

### **a) Diversity, Respect, Communication**

- Encouraging equality and promoting diversity – outlining obligations in a diverse community of staff and students
- Mutual respect, courtesy and professionalism for other members of the community
- Methods of two way communication between staff, students and student representatives
- Respect for physical environment

### **b) Teaching, Learning, Research and Assessment**

- Teaching, Learning and Research Facilities
- HEI support for student-facing staff (including continuing professional development)
- Staff input and learner support, including personal tutors and supervisors
- Students’ responsibilities/obligations as learners
- Assessment and feedback guidelines

### **c) Finance**

- Essential course costs and estimate of additional costs
- Payment options and deadlines
- Financial Advice services available

### **d) Complaints, Appeals, Discipline**

- Redress if students are not satisfied that commitments are being fulfilled
- Complaints and appeals
- Student discipline

### **e) Personal Development and Employment**

- Personal development, including employability
- Professional accreditation (where appropriate)
- Students and part-time work

### **f) Student Services (non academic)**

- Health and welfare support services
- Accommodation and security

### **g) Community, Sports and Social**

- Obligations to wider community
- Sports and social opportunities
- Students and work
- Volunteering