



# WINCHESTER

STUDENT UNION



# STUDENT WRITTEN SUBMISSION

FEBRUARY 2009

# Winchester Student Union Student Written Submission

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## 1) Introduction

### Welcome to Winchester

Winchester Student Union is an organisation which represents the views and opinions of all students attending the University of Winchester. Our mission Statement reads “Winchester Student Union is dedicated to supporting, encouraging, and enhancing the Student Experience.” This is achieved through a variety of activities, from entertainments and social activity to political activism and representation of its students to the upper echelons of the University and on key University committees.

At Winchester Student Union we have a set of Values that we use as a basis for all of our thinking; these are:

**Environment:** We look to not only campaign about issues surrounding our environment, but provide an example for others to follow by reducing our carbon footprint and constantly improving our methods of recycling.

**Community:** We aim to create an inviting atmosphere for all of our students and encourage them to become involved in the local and national student community.

**Friendly and Equal:** We encourage a culture of friendship between all of our students regardless of sex, age, race, religion, disability, sexual preference or any other possible discriminatory factors.

**Loyalty:** We are an organisation that looks to continue our record and responsibility of being loyal and accountable to our students.

**Trust:** We put faith and trust in our students and their ability to manage student activities, as well as inspiring trust in our students by being open and honest with them about their Student Union.

**Student Centric:** The opinions, fears, prospects and wishes of students are at the heart of everything we do and allow us to set targets that are realistic to their expectations.

Winchester Student Union (known hereafter as the Student Union) has been asked as part of the University of Winchester's (hereafter referred to as the University) institutional audit process to complete a Student Written Submission (SWS). In 2005 the Student Union was asked to complete a similar document. We would like to reiterate our comments, from the time, on the importance of the student contribution to an institutional audit. The Student Union would like to thank the QAA for providing us with an opportunity to participate in the audit as we believe it further reinforces the concept that the students' opinions do really matter with regard to quality in teaching and learning.

## Why are we writing this report?

Every Higher Education institution in the UK is responsible for ensuring that appropriate standards are being achieved and a good quality of education is being offered.

The University is due to be audited by the QAA early in 2009. As part of the scrutiny process, the Student Union has been invited by the QAA to submit a report outlining students' experiences and opinions of the 'academic quality'. This covers provision of information, assessment, feedback, student support and provision of facilities rather than the quality of teaching.

The intention of this report is to revisit the areas that were highlighted in the previous SWS (2005), as areas in which the University could improve. This was also done within the framework of four key questions selected to use from the QAA documentation:

1. How accurate is the information that the institution publishes about itself, such as prospectuses, programme descriptions and advertisements?
2. Do students know what is expected of them in order to be successful?
3. What is the student experience as a learner like, including teaching and learning opportunities, support received and access to learning facilities?
4. Do students have a voice in the institution and is it listened to?

The Student Union commissioned Marketing Sciences, a market research agency, to carry out confidential depth interviews with students to help obtain student opinions to feed into our report. This report summarises and comments on the main findings of the depth interviews totalling 25 students. In addition, this report highlights the key findings from the online survey carried out amongst students in November 2008 whilst comparing any key findings with those from our Student Written Submission for the 2005 QAA audit.

## How we prepared?

The aim of this document is to discuss the improvements that have been made within the areas highlighted in the 2005 SWS and other issues which have been identified by our investigations for this audit. We also aim to acknowledge the positives of the student experience.

This report has been authored by the following persons:

Steve Bowers (Student Union President)  
Tim Moss (Student Union Representation and Participation Co-Coordinator)  
Andrew Hodgson (Student Union General Manager)  
Charli Coleman (Student Union Academic Affairs Officer)  
Vanessa Harbour (research student representative)  
Marketing Sciences, an external Market Research Company

It has been approved by the Executive Committee (and trustees) of the organisation after receiving feedback on our findings from the Union Council and student body via our website. Within the report we use information that is comprised from an independent study carried out by Marketing Sciences and ourselves that encompassed both quantitative and qualitative research. As well as this information we use results from the National Student Survey (NSS), NUS information recently released regarding the Student Experience, and the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) that is completed by the University annually.

The reason for enlisting Marketing Sciences was to help gather and code data and to ensure the evidence for the report was collected professionally and impartially, with the correct skills base. Carrying out market research to this extent is a skill that falls outside of the experiences of the members of the Student Union, as well as easing time resource pressures on staff and officers. The Student Union placed a huge value on the research exercise as it would play a key role in our report. We felt confident that by using Marketing Sciences the process and the information gathered would possess greater substance than purely internal research. Furthermore, as was mentioned in our previous SWS, an additional and valid benefit garnered from using an external company was that the research was conducted completely impartially and confidentially.

We made a decision that in our research if we discovered an area that had over a third (33%) of student respondents replying negatively to a question in our survey, we would highlight it as an area of possible concern that needs investigating.

The responses we have received from students regarding the University tended to be very positive. As in 2005 there are some issues that we believe would benefit from further investigation or improvement. In the 2005 Student Written Submission the key areas of improvement that were expressed by us were:

- The Opening Hours for the library.
- Appropriate rooms and spaces being available for appropriate subjects.
- The location of Student Services.
- Feedback on Student Assignment.
- Further general feedback.

In 2009, the following areas were additionally identified:

- The extent of appropriate teaching rooms and spaces that are available for the wide variety of subject areas the University covers.
- The need for more 'group spaces' to enable students to work as groups.
- The link with the University for students from partner colleges (identified by a sample).

Research was also undertaken into the support offered by Student Services and the response to their work was generally very positive indeed, with only their location again being noted as a major issue. However, we recognise that as the University has decided to move the entire department to the Main Building on the University's main King Alfred Campus., as such, it was decided that there was no need to investigate this further.

## 2) Methodology

We conducted our own survey, and complemented this research with results from the National Student Survey (NSS), the University's internal Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) and other data. The University's Intranet (Portal) was used to securely host our online survey (with a link from the Student Union's website). Access was given to all students of the University, including those on our Collaborative Provision programmes, with student logon being required. Completion was by students only as there was a signing in process which ensured that only registered students could take part and be privy to it. When the survey went live, all students were sent an email inviting them to participate and give their feedback about their experience of being a student of the University of Winchester. Students were offered the chance to go into a prize draw. By doing this we achieved a level of response of 888 (over 16% of our total student population) providing an overview of student perspectives on the University and their views on the quality of their courses.

To enter the draw, students were asked to provide their university email address at the end of the survey and this was only used for the prize draw. Any duplicate responses were removed by a checking process carried out by the Student Union to create a database of submissions. A further way to boost the overall response rate was to place reminder messages about completing the survey on the University Portal highlighting the deadline for completing the survey (as well as promoting the prize draw). The online survey was live from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> November 2008. Students were able to participate at any time day or night during this period.

The depth interviews were done to further support our other evidence, as well as giving us some first hand responses to certain questions about the University and student experiences of it. Unlike in the 2004/5 study, in which all 24 students interviewed were based at the main King Alfred's Campus, it was felt that students based at Chute House (Basingstoke) and partner colleges should be included in the depth interviews this time.

To include these additional students within our budget constraints at the Student Union, it was decided that a total of 25 depth interviews would be conducted using similar but updated discussion trails. We split them into two groups to be able to reflect adequately the proportions of students that are studying predominately at the King Alfred Campus and those studying at alternative locations. The results of this split meant that there were:

- 20 face-to-face "depth interviews" with students based at the main campus (King Alfred's).
- 5 telephone depth interviews with students based at Chute House and at external colleges running collaborative regional programmes.

Recruitment for the depth interviews was carried out via the email invite for the online survey and via the message on the University's Portal (Intranet) homepage. The message explained the purpose of the research and asked

for volunteers to take part and offered a £10 incentive to cover time and inconvenience.

We had more difficulty in trying to recruit students based at Chute House and at the partner colleges. In some instances we had to contact students directly (by phone or email). Where information was available, this was done with the help of Student Representatives on specific courses, otherwise Programme Leaders / administrators were contacted to supply names. We would like to extend our thanks to those academic and administrative staff that assisted in identifying students we could contact.

To ensure the inclusion of a range of students in the interviews, all students who offered to help were asked to supply the following details: their home faculty, course of study, whether undergraduate (UG) or postgraduate (PG), whether full-time (FT) or part-time (PT), year of study, and whether they were currently a Student Academic Representative (StAR / Course or Cohort rep).

We did not actively seek student academic representatives or Student Union representatives for these research interviews which ensured we obtained a fully representative group of volunteers that was not dominated with known or listed student reps.

Those students interviewed covered all four faculties: Arts (ARTS), Business, Law and Sports (BLS), Education (EDU), Social Sciences (SOC).

For a complete overview of the interview demographic please refer to appendix 2.

The face-to-face depth interviews were held on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> to Friday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2008 in the Student Union meeting room. Each interview was scheduled to last 45 minutes. Between three and eight interviews were carried out each day.

The telephone depth interviews were conducted on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup>, Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> and Friday 28<sup>th</sup> November (using the same discussion guide as for the face-to-face depth interviews). Those recruited to participate were telephoned (in a dedicated quiet room at the Marketing Sciences offices) at the agreed time by the researcher in charge of the study. Each interview was scheduled to last 45 minutes. One or two interviews were conducted each day.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of the respondents.

## RESULTS

### 3) Communication before the start of the course

91% of those surveyed had read a copy of the University's prospectus when deciding where/what to study. Very few students had an issue with the ease of understanding the prospectus. The majority of students thought their course had matched the description in the prospectus to a good degree. Importantly though, respondents to the online survey answered from memory regarding questions about the prospectus, whereas those interviewed were given access to a copy of the relevant prospectus.

Research shows the prospectus is effective: almost 9 in 10 students who had read it thought it helped when they chose their course (and 46% said 'definitely' and 43% 'somewhat').

Approx 9 in 10 students said the course fulfils their expectations (42% said 'definitely' and 48% 'somewhat'). The percentage was higher amongst postgraduate students, with 71% answering 'yes definitely'. Similarly, around 9 in 10 students said they thought they were told what they need to do (definitely or somewhat) in order to be successful of their course. Both of these responses respond almost directly to the first two QAA questions we noted in our introduction. It is our belief that this is a very positive response to these questions, and shows that the University is clear and honest in its approach to both attracting students to the institution, and then giving them a very clear idea of what is expected of them when they begin their course.

Over half of students said they 'definitely' knew who to ask if they had a question about their studies in general or how to be a more successful student. A further third said they know 'somewhat'.

Most students said they thought they knew what to expect from their course at least to some extent before they started, however all were happy with level of expectation that they had. Most had an idea about what to expect in terms of assessment. Although they only had basic information, again students were satisfied with this level of expectation.

When asked about their expectations before starting the course in terms of tutor support and feedback, two mature students said they were given the impression that they would get more support than they actually received and that they would be able to accommodate the course into their home and family life more easily than had proved possible.

The majority of students said that they did not know what to expect from the tutors in terms of feedback and support before they started. All were happy that they found out when they started University.

#### 4) Opinions of course & fulfilment of expectations

All students were asked whether they felt the description of their course in the prospectus properly reflected the actual course. All but one student felt the description was both accurate and comprehensive.

Nineteen students felt the course fulfilled their expectations in terms of course content. A further five felt it to some extent. One (a regional programme student) felt it did not as a result of changes made to the course structure.

#### Teaching staff

All interviewees thought teaching staff are supportive to the needs of students at least to some extent. Six students (particularly mature students and those on regional programmes) felt staff could give them more support.

All of the students interviewed who were based at King Alfred's said it is reasonably easy to get hold of teaching staff if they needed to speak to them, for example by e-mail, appointment, before or after lectures/seminars.

Of the five students whose courses were not based at King Alfred's, only one thought it was easy to get hold of lecturers. The other four said it can be difficult, particularly if they want to see them on an alternative day to that of their course.

All of the students who were interviewed said that they believed academic staff are, in general, approachable. They also said that they feel they can talk to academic staff about any course issues and concerns about teaching, and have done so. For some this was dependent on the person whilst a few others said it depends on the issue.

All twenty King Alfred's based students said they knew who their Personal Tutor is. All felt that their tutor was approachable, but some of them said they would rather go/talk to someone else who knows more about the course/subject or whom they feel they get on with better. Obviously this is all down to personal preference. Some also said that it was good that their Personal Tutor is someone who directly lectures them while others for whom it was not the case, said they would prefer it to be.

Of the five not based at King Alfred's, only two definitely knew who their Personal Tutor is. Both felt their Personal Tutor was approachable.

## 5) Assessment & Feedback

### Assessment

Students were asked about their experiences of assessment. All said their courses involved some degree of coursework and that the assessment requirements vary for each module. All of those taking part said their work is assessed in a variety of different ways such as essays, assignments, presentations, practical work, seminars, group work, reports, and exams.

All those interviewed felt the course fulfilled their expectations in terms of assessment. All students (including all those on regional programmes) said they were generally assessed twice a semester – midway through the module and at the end of each module (i.e. at the end of each semester). A few said they are assessed more frequently for some modules – either every three weeks or continually each week.

All students were asked whether they felt the timing of the assessment was about right, too often, or not often enough. Whilst one said that they believed that it *“does not seem often enough”*, all other students said the timing of assessments was ‘about right’. Six of those said they preferred it if the assessments for different modules were spaced out so they are not all due in the same week. Below are the thoughts of one such respondent.

*“I think it’s about right. Quite often they are staggered – I prefer it when different modules have different weeks to hand work in so we don’t have 5 pieces to hand in - in week 6 as that can be quite stressful!”*

All students said they are given sufficient notice of assignments. All explained that assignment details and deadlines are detailed in Module Handbooks at the start of the semester which gives students plenty of notice (although some noted they are given an outline and not told full details until later in the module). It was also mentioned by some of those interviewed - that details are given on the University’s Learning Network.

*“Yes – you get told at the beginning of the year in the module handbook and then get more details about the essays 3-4 weeks ahead [of the due date] which gives you plenty of time”*

One person (out of 5) raised an interesting point that may concern those students studying on courses not based in Winchester.

*“We get a module handbook at the start which details the assignments and when they’re due, but they have changed some at the last minute which seems to be a result of lack of communication from Bracknell & Wokingham College and the University of Winchester.”*

When asked if they knew what was expected of them by assignments, the same student said that they did not know what was expected:

However, all other students said they generally knew what was expected from them in assignments as it is detailed in module handbooks (which were considered very useful). Some mentioned that although they do not get all the information up front they are told fuller details prior to the due date.

These students also said the information given to them (about what is expected from them in assignments) is usually both clear and comprehensive. However, a minority did mention that it could sometimes be clearer or more detailed:

*“It’s broken down pretty well in the module handbook, on the whole it’s fine - there were just a few instances on one module where it wasn’t clear enough, but if you don’t understand something they’ll spend time to help us and if necessary go through it individually”*

All students said they would ask for more information if they did not fully know what is expected from them in assignments. Many said they have done so in the past and on the whole have found the additional information useful. One mature student (on a Regional Programme) mentioned that sometimes they preferred to discuss things with students in their cohort group,

*“particularly if the lecturer has already covered it in lecture time and sometimes cohorts can relate better”.*

## Feedback

Feedback was an area that previously was highlighted as an issue at the University but as can be seen the University has made a concerted effort to resolve this in recent years.

None of the students that we interviewed in our own depth survey said they really had any expectations before they started at the University as to the nature of feedback they would receive from their assessment. It should be noted none of the six first year students interviewed had received any feedback at the time of interview as they had only just handed in their first major assignment.

Of the other nineteen students, eleven said they are happy with the feedback they get for assessments. One of the issues from Student Satisfaction surveys in recent years has been a concern about the promptness of feedback, and our research shows that this is a less prominent issue. 74% of those who responded to our online survey were positive about the timeframe in which feedback was received after the handing in of an assignment. This is most certainly an improvement on previous statistics and opinions on this issue. It is something the University has taken very seriously and improved on.

Generally in terms of assignment feedback the responses that we received from both the quantitative research and the depth surveys were positive. One

of the key reasons for students being more satisfied was that they were given better positive and negative feedback enabling them to understand where they could improve.

*“I’m happy with it – they always give you written feedback and they usually annotate the work you’ve handed in which is good so you can see exactly what’s good and what’s wrong with it. And you can always go and make an appointment to see them if you want to”*

The remaining eight students interviewed said the feedback could be improved in some way. Five (including three mature students on regional programmes) thought there could be more consistency between lecturers/modules (and as a result, in some cases more detail).

*“Yes it’s good – we get given a summary, annotated notes and a tick sheet which is good so we can see where we are going right and wrong. But there seems to be a lack of consistency across modules because often if you look at your tick sheets [for several assignments], the tick sheet will look very similar but the mark can be at least 10 points different, which is a lot!”*

*“Some feedback is better than others – some will just give you a sentence whereas others will give you a lot more, which is better so you know how your doing and how you can improve”*

Another student said they prefer to discuss their work with staff and one (a mature student) thought it would be good to have personal feedback from exams.

*“The feedback from essays is very good, very detailed and easy to understand. And you can always speak to people if you want more information. But you don’t get any feedback from exams – you just get a mark and I think it would be useful to get feedback from exams”*

A key issue mentioned in the 2004/5 research was the lack of constructive feedback criticism, but it was not particularly cited this year, indicating that improvements have been made (for example, through encouraging academic staff to give typed rather than handwritten feedback). The NSS results also report an improvement in this area. For instance, the responses to the statement ‘Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand’ are traditionally low on average within the sector, but the University again improved in the 2008 survey with the response of 59% being 3% above the sector average and only 1% below those institutions in the ‘upper quartile’ in their response to this statement. Again this result has improved year on year, with a 7% increase since 2006.

This is supported by our online survey. When we asked whether Students believed that the feedback they received was constructive and helped their studies 78% of Students replied positively, with 40% of those asked giving the top response. This was especially true in the Faculty of Social Sciences,

where we found 84% gave positive responses, compared to the lowest score from the Faculty of Education at 70%.

Another issue noted in the previous Student Written Submission was an inability to read feedback notably because of lecturer's handwriting, and generally the question of students not understanding the feedback given. In our 2009 survey we discovered that 82% of students responded in a positive manner when asked whether they could understand the comments and feedback they received. This is further supported by the 51% of postgraduate respondents who gave the highest possible response in answer to the question. No faculty received higher than 8% negative answers under this heading.

All students interviewed were also asked whether, apart from feedback after assignments, they got general feedback so that they know how they are doing overall. One said they did in tutorials. Another two students said they did when doing practical or group work but they only informally in terms of whether they "are on the right track". The rest said they did not get general feedback, although five did say they could go and ask for it.

All students interviewed (including those who received some feedback, albeit very brief) were asked whether they would like more. Eight said they were happy knowing that they can go to lecturers/tutors and ask for more general feedback if they wanted or needed to.

The other seventeen students said they would like more general feedback (akin to students interviewed in 2004/5). While one said she did not know how she would like to receive it, twelve (including four on regional programmes) specifically mentioned they would like more scheduled tutorials to discuss their overall progress (including strengths and weaknesses) or to receive feedback from modules through their Personal Tutor. Four suggested alternative ways for feedback:

*"It would be useful to get a summary at the end of the year"*

*"It would be nice to have general feedback but I don't really know how because for a lot of the course you are doing your own work. Although it would be nice to know the average mark that students get for assignments so that you can benchmark yourself – not so people know everyone's mark but more so you just know how your mark fits in with the rest of the group so you know if you're about average or need to work harder, for example if you do a piece of work and the mark isn't very good, you can see whether maybe everyone found it harder and you're actually on the same level as everyone else"*

*"It would be good to have an overall mark on how you are doing, combining all the marks for work that counts, so you can see which marks count and what level you are at. So if overall you're marks are showing that you're on a borderline between a 2:2 and a 2:1 you know so you can try to make sure you do well enough in the next assignments to get a 2:1 or whatever."*

A view from a student which sums up the improvement made in terms of feedback since the last report in 2004/05 is the following, where a student comments on how the standard of feedback received had improved over their time at the University.

*“It’s better than it used to be [i.e. in the first year] because then we didn’t always get comments on crib sheets, but now we always get comments so there’s more consistency and you know more about where your weak points are. Once you understand the crib sheets the feedback is easy to understand.”*

## 6) Student Representation and Feedback

### Overview

Academic Departments work to ensure Student Academic Representation (StAR) happens at programme level by running elections in class for students to elect representatives (student reps). The system is linked with the Student Union as the Union Representation and Participation Co-ordinator (RPC) is responsible for preparing, training, and supporting academic representatives. The staff position was originally part funded by the University although employed by the Student Union. Since 2002 when it was set up the role has become fully integrated into the Union; the representation co-ordinator is managed by and reports to the Student Union. The co-ordinator also promotes StAR particularly at the start of each year to maximise awareness and usage of the system and encourage volunteer reps. Talks are given to student groups to explain what can be achieved as well as the benefits of getting involved. These have reached a good number of programmes and are routinely included in induction sessions for certain Foundation Degrees.

During the year, routine e-mail and newsletter updates for reps provide reminders of upcoming meetings. Recent initiatives have sought to both increase the profile of reps develop communications with and between them. This has included the setup of new online networking groups both on the official Learning Network system and a public social networking site.

The Union also maintains University-wide records to ensure course reps are found for all courses and that their positions remain filled by motivated students; this involves regular direct communication with subject staff including administrative staff throughout the year. We also benefit from good relationships and ease of contact with Associate Deans and The Director of Quality. We believe the RPC position continues to provide a valuable role as an impartial support link between reps, though The Student Union, and with The University. In recent times we have strengthened links by running forum sessions for reps to input directly to the Union and also run meetings for course reps for specific faculties to inform them of updates and importantly, to seek reps for faculty level committees. We negotiated successfully to increase the number of reps allowed to attend the faculty level committees of Faculty Quality Committee and Faculty Learning & Teaching Committees. The Union also welcomed being actively invited to contribute to the reorganisation of faculties into academic departments for 2007-08. In 2008-09 the Union also assisted the RKE Centre through advertising for and co-ordinating appointing postgraduate research representatives to senior committees, and we would like to continue to enhance our links with postgraduate research student representatives.

The Union feels it is best to treat reps at all levels (all years of study or seniority) equally so that no matter what type of rep (i.e. for a cohort group, module, programme, or post graduate rep) we offer the same support. The Union has produced standard 'job descriptions' for reps that list basic requirements and we issue printed tip guide handbooks as well as 'welcome

to the role' letters. This we believe, has helped to rid concerns about a number of reps who either questioned what they were supposed to do from the outset, what type of rep they were, or were even unsure whether they were reps. Reps now also know their limitations better, knowing where to refer their peers if problem situations arise that are above the StAR level, are not academic course related, or are not applicable because they affecting individuals rather than student groups. It is with welcomed assistance from faculties that packs of information can be widely issued to the reps on our lists.

In conjunction with the University new guidelines for Student Representation were approved in 2007. These list precepts for all three parties involved (students through their reps, the Student Union, and the University) in making student representation work in the best possible way. It is available on the University Portal and our website at our resource area [www.winchesterstudents.co.uk/star](http://www.winchesterstudents.co.uk/star) and is a guide to the best practices.

### What our online survey showed

Our online survey was open to all students. In the area of Student Academic Representation (StAR) we first asked questions to ascertain awareness about the student academic representation system and then subsequently asked further specific representation related questions of those who were aware that every course should have student representatives. It also posed particular questions for course reps themselves that could be skipped by others. Of respondents aware of StAR, 11% were reps themselves (equivalent to 7% of all respondents). Academic representatives from all years and faculties participated in the survey.

Our commissioned research showed that 72% of respondents were aware that every course/programme should have Student Academic Representatives. Of those from year 1 the figure was lower at 64%, although ongoing study leads to more recognition (up to 79% in year 3 (see chart R in the appendices). Although some concern here may be alleviated when considering the amount of information students may need to take in during their first weeks, it does lead us to believe that the introduction of reps and information given about StAR in class by tutors could be being applied inconsistently. Certain subjects benefit from real extra staff efforts to ensure the profile of student reps is good (dedicated notice board space, assistance with messages, even on-screen profiles), but there may be scope to improve this in others or at least apply the best practices more consistently throughout all areas.

There was a mixed response to the question of whether students felt able to inform their student rep of any problems or concerns, 2 in 5 said they 'definitely', 25% agreed 'somewhat', whilst the same proportion felt this was 'not really' or 'definitely not' the case (Chart T). However, it should be recognised that there are a number of other routes beyond student reps for students with concerns, and that student reps are advised to know their limits,

which usually do not extend above issues affecting the specific group of students they represent.

Our results do highlight one area of concern regarding the awareness of student reps and the StAR system by the general body of students, whereas the survey results were very encouraging concerning the input effectiveness of reps themselves. Overall 69% of our survey participants said they knew who their course rep was. Year 2 showed the most recognition about student academic representatives, even though SU records in the past have shown a dip for year 2 in the ease of filling all student reps positions.

It is good to confirm that most student reps said they felt their opinions were definitely listened to by the University (a further third said somewhat). Only three of the 61 reps completing the online survey felt they were not really listened to. Furthermore, we were encouraged that over half reported that they were given time in class or group meetings to seek feedback from peers about the running of their course, although more said 'somewhat' than 'definitely' (37% and 18% respectively). This is an example of real effort put towards assisting reps to carry out their roles. Indeed our commissioned individual interviews (see section below) indicated further improvement: all reps said they are able to discuss course issues with their fellow students. Six of the seven reps said academic staff allowed them time in lectures, whereas in the 2004/5 study three of the seven reps thought that academic staff could give more time to help them. We would like it to extend this attitude to all.

Of those who participated, when asked specifically, overall students thought their academic concerns were well represented to the University. (based on a mean score of 3.18, calculated on a four point scale where 1 means 'definitely not' and 4 means 'yes definitely' – see appendix Chart Y)

### Findings from depth interviews

All the students interviewed were aware that every course should have student reps and were also aware of their role. Some (eight students) were reps themselves. All felt their opinions were listened to in meetings with academic staff and, at the time of the meetings, felt their questions were considered and answered reasonably.

Another positive was that all reps felt their opinions were acted on. However, some expressed a wish to obtain greater feedback from staff on actions made following their input and on issues raised. Providing reps with more direct information would allow them to provide easier responses to student groups. Minutes of meetings were usually made available in reasonable time by all departments/subjects, but students still feel that more feedback could be given to them. It is difficult to ascertain the extent of how minutes of committee meetings are displayed or circulated, and it is likely there is some variability across disciplines. The Union has not heard of concerns from reps

about the availability, so it seems they are likely always issued or accessible to reps themselves.

The agency's depth research also found that whilst the majority of other students interviewed felt their concerns were carried forward by reps, it was difficult to say whether they were resolved because they do not receive (enough) feedback themselves. Reps do have a responsibility themselves to feed back to student groups, consequently, it might be possible to train or support them better in this task – for instance, especially with new electronic networking options and the Learning Network.

Some detailed findings were as follows:

Of the eight reps in our 25 interviewees one student studying on a regional programme had only recently taken on the role, so was unable to answer further questions about being a rep. All the others had attended at least one committee meeting and all felt their opinions were listened to in the meeting(s) by the academic staff. All seven reps said that, at the time of the meetings, they felt their questions were considered and answered reasonably by academic staff.

All also felt their opinions are acted on at least 'to some extent'. One rep complimented academic staff for the recent feedback given following an e-mail sent outlining student concerns about the course:

*"I sent an email about concerns that students had raised and things we wanted changed. I definitely felt our opinions were heard and considered because in reply I was given an answer and explanation to each point. That was really good as it had shown they had really thought about it".*

However, negative points were made in the same area, with the wish for more feedback on the issues which were raised so that reps could be certain that their concerns had been heard and considered. Reps recognised that the academic year changeover can have an effect, but they reported that (if practical) they would still like to know outcomes even where changes were not possible; they did not necessarily know whether some of their recommendations were acted on for students in subsequent years:

*"At the time [of the meetings] I feel we are listened to but then you go a few months down the road and then you think 'did they actually take it on board' or was it all lip service. It's quite hard to judge - it might be things they want to do but there's reasons why they can't do it but we're not told about it so. I'd like to think that they do take on board anything that we feed back. But I think they could give us more feedback in terms of 'we listened, this was possible but that wasn't because of X, Y and Z' because at least we could feed that back to other students and say look they took it on board, they can do this but can't do this and these are the reasons why they can't do it. I know that a lady from the UoW comes to the meetings at Bracknell & Wokingham College which is good. I know some of the issues that we raise are down to Winchester and are not things that Bracknell & Wokingham College can just*

*say yes we'll do that – they have to run it past Winchester. I think it would definitely be good to have more feedback because having sat in on the last meeting, hearing the Year 1 Reps raise the same issues that we raised last year is quite disheartening – we just felt ‘what was the point as you’ve done nothing about it’. You don’t want to feel like you’re wasting your time here.”*

When asked if, as reps, they felt able to discuss relevant issues with fellow students in class or through other means, all seven reps said they did, which again was commendable. Six of the seven said that academic staff allow them time in lectures so they can ask all students doing that module/course for their feedback. We consider this is a real step forward that has really come into being since the 2004/05 audit. One rep did say they found it difficult to contact everyone (fellow students). This is a difficulty especially with combined honours groups, especially after the first year when differing module selections can mean reps may not see all the students they represent easily in class or even at all.

A point which did not tie directly with the findings of our online survey was that when the seventeen students interviewed who were not course reps (StAR's) were asked if they were aware that every course has student representatives, all said they were aware. One postgraduate student though said they did not know whether this applied to Masters' courses (which it should for all).

Eleven of those interviewed said they knew individually who their reps were. Of those, all but one said their reps have asked for their opinions or feedback, in lectures, via email, or via Facebook, which is a credit to the work of individual representatives. All eleven said they felt able to voice any concerns they might have with their Student Academic Reps. Three of the six students who do not yet know who their Reps are for this year, said that they have known in previous years; sometimes it can take longer than wished to entuse students to forward volunteer reps. Improvement has been made in the system for confirming reps for 2<sup>nd</sup> year groups and onwards, either by (student groups) confirming continuation into a new academic year in the role by their rep(s) or election of new reps. Full lists of reps cannot usually be obtained and collated by the Student Union until towards the end of term one. Until then, this gives the problem that vacant slots on lists cannot be identified for certain as definite vacancies which need to be advertised because of the uncertain reliance of full information (reps names). On occasion it is communicated to us that a year group or subject is having particular difficulty enthusing students; in these instances we can help, so this information is welcomed. Many lists from courses are often submitted in time for us to plan training sessions optimally, but they are not *always* sent to us. However, no one subject area shows consistent problems in identifying reps or when changes occur.

To monitor how well overall we are finding and keeping reps requires identifying all programmes running each academic year as well as the relevant academic staff. This work has increased as the numbers and locations of programmes, including sub-degree courses, has increased. Overall, although there is usually some missing data, for terms 2 and 3 in

semester 2, we are consistently able to compile lists that indicate that very good numbers of reps are in place. We recommend that all programmes no matter how small make sure student reps are identified and names submitted to the Student Union so we can offer support information to them, but for part-time regional programmes this does not always seem to happen.

All students interviewed who were not student reps themselves were asked if they thought having a representative was useful. While one comment "*nothing ever changes*" was forwarded, other positive comments said:

*"It's good because our concerns can be voiced through one person" - "If we have any problems, it's more of an 'official line'" and... "It is useful, particularly if the Reps themselves are good and effective"*

An overall thought is summed up by a response that highlights the confidence students do have in the system, along with how it could be better:

*"The Reps don't really have any authority against the lecturers and staff. [I think it could be improved] by publishing the minutes so all the students can check what is going on rather than just the Reps, because it would be public. Like for example, when last year they never really listened to the reps, we got them to publish the minutes so that they had to say 'we will do this' and then when they didn't we could straight away go back to them and say 'well you haven't'. So it's good as well for students to know what's going on with their course and to know reasons why if problems genuinely cannot be resolved, instead of lecturers always having to talk to individual students they can just say it's explained in the minutes. It works both ways and it's just more professional".*

## 7) Library Facilities

We felt it best in this category to separate those students that study in Winchester (20 interviewed), and those that study at alternative locations such as Chute House or a partner college (5 interviewed).

### Students based at King Alfred Campus

Usage of the Marital Rose library varied according to the year of study, with first year students tending to use it once or twice a fortnight and second, third and fourth year students using it 3-7 times a week.

Four of the students said they mainly used the library as a resource rather than a work place. They preferred to just take books out and work at home but stressed they did not do so because they had a criticism about the library as a space to work, it was simply down to personal preference.

All of the remaining students said they thought the library was a fairly good working area. Most also thought it was a quiet working area, although five said that it can sometimes be a bit noisy. A couple said that the new layout of the library (with a computer on every desk rather than one floor of computers) was a problem while others thought staff and lack of group spaces resulted in it being noisy:

*"It's not always particularly quiet if you want to work on a computer in the library. And it's not brilliant the way they've got it now with a computer on all the desks. Before they had a floor of computers so the desks next to the books were empty so you could take a stack of book [sit there and] read through. Now you're unlikely to get a whole table to yourself because there's a computer and another chair on each. I just find it a bit distracting with people on the computers and it means there's less space."*

It should be noted at this point that this change in where the computers are situated came about for a number of reasons. Firstly the University has spent a lot of money on the redevelopment of the campus, including the new University Centre, which along with housing the Student Union is also home to the Learning Café, which has provided students with a more informal learning space. This has migrated the social epicentre of the campus from the top floor of the library, which used to serve as a general computing area, to the Learning Café. This has meant that the computers that were on the top floor have now been spaced out throughout the library. This allowed space for the Law library to be expanded upon since its inception as a subject.

All twenty King Alfred's based students felt that the library was easy to use both in terms of finding what they wanted and checking the books in and out.

Five students spontaneously said that the online facility to renew books is good. Of those, four were in at least their second year at the University and felt this was a definite improvement to the library system.

Seventeen of the twenty students had attended a training or induction session on how to use the Library soon after they started at the institution. Most thought the library training was useful (at least to some extent). However two felt that it would have been more useful if had taken place in week one rather than week two or three as by which time they'd found out most of it by themselves.

All of the King Alfred's based students said they thought that the library staff were generally helpful, approachable and easy to get hold of or find if they needed help/advice. Two of students did say that some members of staff are better than others.

Eight of the twenty King Alfred's based students felt there were enough books for their course in terms of both the range and the number of copies. Of the remainder, four thought the range of books could be improved by having "*newer, up to date or more modern/contemporary books*" and "*(more) books on smaller, more specific things*" while eight thought there was a need for more copies of books (particularly of the core texts or those deemed as 'recommended reading material' by academic staff). A student said:

*"There is a lack of books for psychology but the library had loads for my second subject [which I also studied last year]. They need more core texts – you end up having to buy them in order to do the reading as there may only be two copies for 60-70 people."*

Five students spontaneously mentioned that the online journal facility is a useful facility as it allows everyone to use the journals at the same time if they want. The five students who mentioned this are in the second or third year and all felt it has improved during their time at the institution:

*"The online journal system is really good because as many people as they want can access it and there's no competition. They are constantly adding to it and they buy into different online journal systems. It tends to be that every time you search on it, there is a little bit more. And for our course, they make us go on a fresher course on how to use it most effectively, which is frustrating when you know how to use it but it makes sure everyone has equal opportunity to access it and use it."*

All twenty students were reasonably happy with the loan periods. However, three thought that it would be useful if the four week loan period was reduced, perhaps to two weeks, particularly when there are only one or two copies of a book. Three mentioned that while they understood the reason for having 24hr loan books, it can be difficult to return them by the deadline, so felt it would be useful if this was extended slightly. Another student said "*it would useful if loan periods were extended for post-graduates because loans 7 days or under were not long enough*".

The majority of students felt the fines given were fair because other people need to use the books. Two students commented that they are fairer than they used to be. Another thought the fines were actually quite cheap. Only one student said the fines were not really very fair and felt a points system would be better. A further three thought the 24-hour loan fine is quite steep, although appreciated that there was a reason for it.

One student thought it was good that the library emails students when their book is overdue to remind students to return the books to help them avoid ending up with a large fine.

Students were asked whether they felt the library opening hours were convenient. Ten felt they were. These were all first and second year undergraduates and a few said their view might change if they have to use the library more often in their final year. On the other hand, like many of the students interviewed in 2004/5, nine students (all second or third year undergraduates, and, postgraduates) spontaneously said the library should be open longer at weekends. It was felt that the library should open earlier on Sunday (at 9am or 10am) and also stay open later on Saturday and Sunday (until sometime between 6pm and 10pm).

One mature student also felt it would be useful if the library was open slightly earlier during the week:

*“Personally I’d rather they were open just a quarter of an hour earlier. They open at 8.15am and if you’re driving in you have to be in reasonably early to get through the traffic so it would be handy to do an hours work [before lectures at 9am]. Whereas by the time you get in [the library] at 8.15am and you’ve got a lecture at 9am, then you have to be out at quarter to so half an hours not that a useful block of time.”*

Our depth survey showed again that in general most people were satisfied with the opening times for the library, with 64% saying that they were very happy with them.

Students were asked if the library could be improved in any other ways. Three said there should be more group spaces in the library as they were unable to work elsewhere due to the need to use journals and reference-only books.

### Students on Regional Programmes

Five of the students interviewed came from programmes not running at Winchester and none of those came to the University’s main King Alfred’s campus as part of their course or to study and therefore do not use the Martial Rose Library (although some did visit it as part of an open day). For the four whose courses are based at the Chute House (Basingstoke) campus or Bracknell & Wokingham College, the reason for their non-use was a combination of the distance from home/work and time pressures (particularly

if they have children). A student who is on a course for the Diocese of Winchester (and so based in Winchester) said she does not come onto campus because:

*“...I do not find the site very easy with my illness and the library does not carry the books that I need for my course - I found that out when looked at the online library system. I think it’s because the course is external... I have to buy the main texts or go to Guildford Cathedral. I think the library could be improved by stocking a wider range and more copies. The staff and tutors know there’s a lack of books but they said the course is fairly new to the University.”*

Instead these students tended to use the library where they were based or public libraries/venues close to home.

Both of the students based at Bracknell & Wokingham College mentioned that it was good that the University of Winchester has bought books to go into their College library for their course. There was an issue with any student at the College being able to use the books, which meant that sometimes the books were unavailable. They believe the course tutors are addressing this issue by creating their own library to avoid this problem.

A student based at Logica / Chute House noted she was happy with the provision of books:

*“The Chute House library is quite small but it seems to have everything we need. However we are provided with the core texts as these are bought for us by Logica”*

However, a different student based at Chute House was very disappointed with the library facilities at Chute House and thought they could definitely be improved:

*“Due to time pressures we have to rely on the Chute House library but I don’t think it is very good...there are insufficient books at Chute House.”*

All five students mentioned the University of Winchester’s online journal system. Two thought it was good because it could be accessed anywhere and found it quite easy access. Others said they have tried to use it but find it too difficult and time consuming, so avoid using it. Although they had been told how to use it, they thought it would be useful to have more training on how to use it effectively, providing this was during course time to enable them to attend.

## Overall Impressions

Generally since the last SWS there has been an improvement in the services offered by the library and the head librarian is very happy to talk to students about any issues, and reply to any student enquiries. There have also now been a number of open forums organised by the Student Union and the library

to discuss any issues which students wish to bring up with the library, and where there is a chance to air any grievances and share ideas and thoughts about what could be done to improve the service even further.

## 8) Learning Resources, Equipment, and Spaces

All students were asked if they were provided with any other equipment, resources and spaces (including media, performance, sports and teaching) that they needed for their course and whether they felt they should be provided with anything else to help them succeed in their studies.

Seven of the students interviewed said they were not provided with anything else but this was not a problem as they did not feel they needed anything else for their course. Another student said they did not need to use any other specific equipment/resources for their course but felt there should be tables in all lecture rooms:

*“One of my lecture rooms doesn’t have tables in - room 206 Herbert Jarman Building. Obviously I’m not the Dean or Chancellor or whatever of here, but if I was ever setting up or in charge of a uni, you have to think about the basics – everyone needs something to sit on so everyone gets a chair, everyone needs something to write on so everyone gets a table – little things like that! I mean there are tilted blinds in the Library to stop a certain amount of sunlight going in – that’s great, I appreciate that – obviously someone had thought about that but someone didn’t think about something as simple as a table in a room!! There’s just one small table in that whole room and there’s 60 of us in the class!! Medecroft 18 also doesn’t have tables in and we have 2-3 hour lectures in there! You’re supposed to be looking at a projector, reading it and listening so it’s hard to make notes as well when you haven’t got tables. I just don’t bother trying to make notes anymore!”*

The remaining sixteen students said they were provided with other equipment, resources or spaces for their course.

Seven said they were provided with media equipment. Of those, some said that although they had not needed to use the equipment, they thought it was good that they had access to it (should they want to use it) and that they would be trained how to use it. The remaining five (all Media &/or Film students based at King Alfred campus) said they have used some of the media equipment. All five were happy with the provision of equipment generally, the quality of the equipment, and the fact they were given good training on how to use it. Four said that while it is good, it would be better if there were more cameras, particularly when everyone needs to use them at the end of term. Another student commented on the Apple Mac Suite and said that whilst it was really good and the computers were reliable, *“students have to share computers in class which is frustrating because everyone wants to do it themselves!”*

An issue, which had been raised in our previous SWS, was performance spaces, for example within the Stripe, Arts Centre, Performance Gym, and West Downs campus. This time students were happy with the provision of performance spaces and said they could usually get an appropriate room to use when they needed to. One said the only time it can be difficult was at the end of the year when first, second, and third year students all needed to use

them at the same time, although they understood that this could not be helped. A student did express a concern that there would not be enough spaces in the future if West Downs is turned into a Business School.

Another two students interviewed said they used the equipment in the University's sports physiology lab, such as breathing machines. Both students were reasonably happy with the provision of equipment, although both felt it would be useful to have more equipment:

*"It would be good if there was more and better equipment so more students can see how it works and use it, and so become more familiar with it as we don't necessarily fully understand how it works which makes it difficult to talk about using it when writing assignments"*

A student of Psychology said the institution provides EEG and lie detector test machines for them to use in practical sessions. They felt that whilst the equipment was good that it would be useful to have had more training on how it worked and how to use it so that *"students know more about what equipment is available to them ready for their third year"*.

Two education students said they had access to the Schools Resources Library. Both thought this was a useful facility to have but said they did not really know what resources were available in this Library:

*"We get access to the Schools Resources which is handy. And it's really good that there are no fines on them, so if you're on school placement and you're late bringing it back, you don't get fined which is nice. There's lots of children's books and resources that you can actually take into schools if you are on placement and trying to teach something specific – although I don't know exactly what there is. Availability seems to be okay as they've had what I've needed when I've needed it so far but I am aware there's not masses there and there's a lot more books than resources so I might find when I'm having to write my own lesson plans and teach 100% it might be difficult to get everything I need."*

Two students said that they are provided with the computer statistics program SPSS, which they needed for their course. However one felt that the provision of this could be better, saying *"you have to rent it and it's only on 24-hour loan"* as this forced them to obtain it from elsewhere so they could use it at any time at home. The other student said she had to buy it so she could use it at home, which she did not necessarily mind doing, but felt the £10 cost was too high and that £5 would be more acceptable.

Although not provided with anything else by the University, a student based at Logica studying at Chute House mentioned that Logica provided students on their course with a laptop. Although this was provided as part of the job, they were told that they could also use it for study, which was liked.

At some point during the interview, at least a quarter of students based at King Alfred Campus said there needed to be more "group spaces" enabling

them to do group work by allowing them to talk to each other, especially without disturbing other students. Three students specifically mentioned that this was needed in the library to enable them to use the books.

## 9) Evaluation

In essence the majority of this Student Written Submission comes from findings we discovered from the survey provided for us by Marketing Science. While this was not initially a conscious decision, it was felt that this survey covered a much broader range and diversity of students than the other data available to us. For instance the National Student Survey, while being a very insightful and useful source of information, is only applicable to final year students, while the Marketing Science survey dealt with a broader range of issues that are ongoing from first year to final year students. Secondly, while the University's own Student Satisfaction Survey does cover all year groups; the data we received from Marketing Science had the advantage of being in two formats, the online survey and the depth survey interviews. Both brought up many interesting points for discussion. The depth surveys also allowed us to have a completely unbiased look at how the University is seen in the eyes of the most important people within it, the students. It was crucial for us to be able to have information that was first hand, with statements and views that could be backed up, or proven wrong by the online survey, in order for us to give the material for this submission. Finally, it was important for us to use this data and conduct our survey so that we could be up to date and relevant with students' views across the institution. There would be absolutely no point in being able to tell you what the University is or is not doing well at if we used information that was six months old, this is a fast paced University that we feel, picks up and rectifies mistakes as quickly as possible.

Whilst we are satisfied with the information we were able to gather for this report there are some elements that we would have wished to improve. It is important to note that due to the limitations previously mentioned there was not a broad range of students from regional programmes involved in the depth survey. Those that were surveyed, while their comments were much appreciated, were not representative of all the vast array of regional programmes and collaborative provision offered by the University.

## 10) Conclusion

Overall the consistent view of students is that the University provides very good quality in its teaching and provision for learning. The purpose of this document, as we have discussed, is to look over the issues raised and improvements made from the previous Student Written Submission, and also to try and answer four key questions we selected from QAA documentation. As was showed in the first area of our results, the institution is both accurate in it's advertising and published material and in the way it conveys to students what is expected of them as learners. In the rest of the results area of the document we have, it is our belief, displayed positive answers to the other two questions regarding what students experience as a learner is like and whether students have a voice in the institution.

This is shown most clearly from results within our quantitative research when asked the question "Do you enjoy the Student Experience at the University of Winchester?" the result was a resounding yes, with over 71% of students replying yes definitely, and a further 25% responding that they somewhat enjoyed the experience. Only 4% of all those surveyed were dissatisfied in any way with the experience that they have had since being at the University, with only one percent replying with the answer 'definitely not'.

It should be mentioned however, that satisfaction does dip from those in their first year of study to those in their final year of an undergraduate course, with a 5% drop from those that replied 'yes definitely' from first to second year and a further 7% drop from second to third year respondents. The majority of which responded 'Yes somewhat'. At no point does the percentage of dissatisfaction ever rise above 7%, all the way from first year undergraduate to postgraduate study.

In response to whether students have a voice in the institution, we believe that there is information within this document that proves not only does the University actively encourage student representation in all areas of its work, it also gives students the opportunity for a right to reply and when issues or concerns are raised, there is a determined effort to do something about them and improve the learning environment for it's students every chance it gets.

From the material gathered it is the opinion of this Student Union that there are two key areas for improvement in the work the University does:

- Better links for students from partner colleges and campuses. Some issues clearly arose from a need for further communication and greater links being created to help both staff and students.
- Increase the appropriate rooms and spaces that are available for the wide variety of subject areas the University covers.

In answer to both of these points, we do note that the University has developed action to support these areas. Within the last six months the University has set up a Collaborative Provision Committee to increase the

links between the main Winchester campus and partner colleges, regional programmes and collaborative provision.

There has also been a conscious effort by the institution to improve the standard of teaching rooms available with the building of a new Performing Arts block to replace the rooms in the West Downs centre which will become part of the Winchester Business School. There is also work underway to create a new building to further engage with new and innovative methods of learning and teaching. Student Services department is also moving to a more suitable central location, to further improve the student experience of those studying at the University.

While the University has not excelled in every single area reported on in this study, it is interesting to look at how it reacts to issues when highlighted. The Student Union President has had the opportunity to talk with a number of student officials and officers at other universities. Whenever we discuss relationships with our respective Universities, we feel our institution comes out on top. As can be seen in the evidence we have provided, there is a keen sense, that academic and support staff are enthusiastic and willing to do the utmost to provide a safe and structured environment for students to enjoy their learning experience.

There are issues that have arose from our report which were raised in the last Student Written Submission in 2004/5, predominately learning resources, rooms and available spaces, and the continuing subject of feedback. It is interesting to look at how these issues have been handled not only since then, but whenever issues have reared their head. Our view is that the University does not just go through the motions of a committee structure; rather there is a genuine desire to improve every year and not settle even if things have got to a point which generally the institution could be 'satisfied' with. As can be seen from the improving NSS results and from our survey, in terms of feedback and the proactive solutions to concerns regarding graduate employment when students leave the institution, the strong view of the majority of students is that Winchester is a continually developing and hard-working student centred University.



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