



UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN STUDENTS' UNION Vice President Academic Affairs Report January

Introduction

Welcome back everybody! I hope you have all had a fantastic break, and ready for the rest of the year. It's been a busy month again, working on 2 major issues within higher education both nationally and Lincoln.

Quality Assurance Agency Consultation

The University of Lincoln and The Student's Union have submitted responses to the consultations held around higher education reforms and the office for students. Alongside this, an additional response to the consultations was submitted on behalf of the students at the university. This was included as a supplementary support document, but the answers that were submitted to the set questions very much followed this theme.

"Throughout the consultations on the regulatory framework of the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency Quality Code, we have sought the opinions and feedback of students at the University of Lincoln. After working with the University's Head of Academic Quality, a presentation was given to 120 students at an all student members meeting, and 110 students at a forum for our student academic representatives, outlining the proposed changes.

Upon the questions that were being asked by students, it is clear that the need for such questions highlights the potential impacts of both the proposed changes and the consultation process itself.

“What would happen after a complaint has been made (through the complaints process)?” – throughout the consultation, there has been no clear guidance on how this process will be handled. This presents a limitation on how students can shape change throughout their time at university – it would seem that the need for student voice becomes somewhat of a surplus the design of a transactional authority such as the CMA (Consumer Market Authority)

“Are they using the words ‘Value for money’?” – it was explained to the students that the use of this phrase occurred 28 times throughout the consultation documents. With this, it again shows a focus on making higher education a much more transactional process. Some students noted value for money should be an important factor in choosing a University, but this should not come at the sacrifice of student engagement, something that does not feature as a core expectation of the Quality Code – despite the QAA naming it as one of the OfS’ Priorities.

“Do they take other things in to account or is it just what you earn?” – As a student at the university of Lincoln, this creates a difficult position for our students. The reduced weighting of the National Student Survey (NSS) within the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the inclusion of the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data means that Universities will be rated mostly by how much money their graduates earn. It was highlighted by another student that if we go to a higher ranked university, regardless of how good teaching was, that University would continue to be ranked higher as the student’s will be earning more.

Whilst the principle of widening participation is absolutely important, the methods of doing so are questionable. The use of a 2-year accelerated degree is attractive to those who wish to retrain for a different career, but the use of the tagline “same quality” is brought in to question when the demands of both students and staff is increased. Combined with the risk based approach, Lack of student engagement and employability as core expectations, focus on outcomes and the changes to the TEF, the idea of student partnerships becomes effectively severed. As a University that has held student engagement and student voice at its core values the proposed framework stands to reduce the value of a student’s degree, directly conflicting with Objective 2 of the OFS “qualifications hold their value over time”.

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As an institution and a Student’s Union, the vast majority of our students purposefully choose to study at Lincoln for the community feeling and because their voice is listened to and acted upon; their experience during university is valued, just as much as their money wherever possible. As a result of these proposed changes, a student who wishes to stay in that same environment to work stands to be of less “Value” to their respective industry for the same reason. There is no doubt that the University of Lincoln and the University of Lincoln Student’s Union will work in partnership to ensure that our students have the best experience they possibly can throughout their time here. To our students this defines quality, and something that should be amongst the core expectations throughout this consultation. “

SUggestions

Since my previous report I have been working on 2 Suggestion's. The first have been working on is getting more computing in the AAD building. There needs to be more university computers available in the AAD west building for CAD and printing purposes. Currently there is only one computer suite on the third floor with 18 computers. This is for both Architecture and Interior architecture students to use. When it comes to deadlines this is an issue as students are unable to print from laptops, so 18 computers have to be shared between around 250/300 students. Considering there are also scheduled sessions in this room, the computers are sometimes completely unavailable, having an impact on our work. After speaking with Drew Cook, Director of ICT, the ICT Team will explore the AAD building for potential spaces to place more computers to work on.

The Second idea I have been working on is a suggestion to install F.lux on the library computers. F.lux is a program that adjusts a display's colour temperature according to location and time of day. The program was designed to reduce eye strain during night-time use and reduce disruption of sleep patterns, but can be customised or turned off should the user not wish to use it. As Student Leaders, we support this idea, as we feel it would only be of benefit to the students. This programme is already installed on machines for computer science students. For this reason, this SUGesstion was fast – tracked. After speaking to Drew Cook, Director of ICT and Ian Snowley, University Librarian this would be explored by the ICT team.

CourseMate

In the coming month, the SU will release CourseMate! CourseMate is a suggestion platform (just like SUGesstions) specifically for your course! Your School Rep and your course reps will be trained on how to use the system to help action any ideas for your course! It will be available both online and on mobile! Stay Tuned!

The Next Virtual Learning Environment

As part of my manifesto, I ran to work with the University to work on improving our Virtual Learning Environment, BlackBoard. Despite a period of outage at the start of the academic year, BlackBoard has already seen some improvements in the form of an update that occurred over the summer. With this, a new BlackBoard App was released which allows students to view modules, grades, announcements and lecture materials all from a mobile device!

As part of this pledge, discussions have now been opened as to what the future of our Virtual Learning Environment may look like. Since my last report, a team of students and university staff members met to compile a list of features that we feel should be included in the next Virtual Learning environment! If you have any other suggestions, feel free to get in touch!

Virtual Learning Environment Potential Features List

Service

- Available 24/7 with zero downtime
- Internationally available
- Cross platform
- Accessible
- Responsive

Coherent and consistent

- Intuitive and familiar (not necessarily all the same)
- A single gateway to the wider Lincoln experience (mobile friendly)
- Encourages student engagement with notifications (for students and staff)
- Context based support documentation/video

Productivity tools

- Access to a personalised calendar detailing taught/assessed events, time and location
- Industry standard tools (support transferable skill development)

Communication tools

- Email
- Text
- Personalised and targeted announcements/notice board
- Links to supporting Lincoln community social media channels/tools/websites

Module Organisation

- Module information (module handbook, syllabus, assessment methods, expectations of prior learning, copyright information etc.)
- Curriculum map (record of what was taught, when and how)
- Module evaluation survey (with past feedback?)

Module Communication Tools

- Students can post queries and seek advice/support from lecturer/peers

Learning Resource Repository

- Content store (module learning resources: documents; videos; presentations; etc.)

- Content management (release management and version control)
- Content creation tools (integrated)
- Library resource list (integrated)

Module Gradebook & Record of Attainment

- Online assignment/coursework submission

Personal Learning Space

- Personal reflection (learning journal)
- Evidencing personal achievements
- Presentation space/billboard
- Record outcomes of tutor meetings

Assessment for Learning

- Formative testing environments (quizzes)
- Assignment drop box (supports multiple formats)
- Assessment rubrics to support peer review
- Feedback (text, audio or video)
- Assignment drop box (supports multiple formats)
- online examination support
- Online marking
- Feedback (text, audio or video)
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Collaboration Tools

- Social sharing (of additional resources)
- Discussion tools
- Posting resources (for peer comments)
- Facilitate group work
- Online classroom

One-to-one support

- Instant messenger
- Video communication

Adaptive Learning Support

- Access to learning resources based on achievement

