

# University of Brighton Students' Union

## Academic Forum – School of Applied Social Science

Held – 22nd November 2010 at the Checkland Building, Falmer

Present - 4 students

Chair –Emily-Ann Nash (EAN) and Amy Rutland (AR)

Secretary – Katrina Mayo

1. The session commenced discussing NSS data for the School of Applied Social Science. Students noted that the following points were highlighted:

- Poor Organisation
- Poor Feedback

AR noted that a 20 day turnaround for feedback on written work has been agreed in the school

Students then raised the following points

- An ongoing issue seems to be the quantity of books available
- Students doing the English and Sociology degree agreed with comments in the NSS that they can feel caught between the two schools. An example being that due to a timetabling clash they had to watch their English lectures on video.
- Students need to be made aware of the fees for the following year as soon as the information becomes available – so they can plan in advance
- A general point was made that the university needs to clearly communicate to students their site of study when they apply for a course
- Positive comments were made about the enthusiasm, engagement and good support provided by staff in SASS
- The timetable is a problem; it is not available until the first day of term. Students have family and work commitments they need to plan around the timetable. They would like it to be available 2-3 weeks before the start of term (even if not exact, it would at least provide them with an indication)
- A reading list for the next year should be given out before the summer break.
- It would help students to select modules in an informed way if brief abstracts about each module were available for them to read prior to selection.

- The students present felt that they received sufficient teaching and their learning experience also incorporated the other resources (e.g. library) that are available
- Students at the beginning of their courses would benefit from some more guidance on approaches to learning. This was communicated in the first week of the term but there is so much else going on then it is not easy to take it all in. It should maybe be reinforced at regular intervals that students do need to take personal responsibility 'your learning is down to you' and the importance of personal reflection and research
- The staff at SASS are easy to approach and keen to help students. Students appreciate when reminders are sent out regarding impending deadlines. SASS is good at maintaining contact time in the third year.
- The fact that first year marks do not count gives the wrong impression to students. It can lead to the idea you only need to scrape through with 40% and does not encourage engagement with the course. Students present would like the first year marks to count even if it is only for 10% of the final grade

2. The discussion then moved on to what attributes in teachers should be recognised / rewarded by the student body. The following features were identified:

- Going beyond their normal responsibilities and efficiently dealing with queries
- A lecturer who goes above and beyond, for example someone who queried whether a student might have dyslexia and then was prepared to spend the additional time to go through all their work and fully supported them.
- Personable, supportive and caring about a student's personal situation

3. EAN raised the issue of increased fees. If fees were increased some students felt that because of their personal circumstances they would not have been able to attend university. If they were attending with the increased fees the improvements/developments students would like to see were:

- Clear guidance regarding career pathways post graduation. More work skills support.
- Links with business so you can tailor your skills towards specific jobs

There was then some discussion, the links to future jobs were felt to be important but there was also the view that education should be so much more than just looking towards a job, it's an amazing opportunity for personal growth – this should not be lost.

No one would like University to again become an elitist institution, only for those who can afford it

4. ICT/ E-learning and the developments that would be useful in these areas were then discussed. The following was discussed

- A text system may be introduced for notifying students – this was seen as an efficient method for contacting students.
- Emails are seen as being fine (though there have been some problems with the new email addresses with messages going into junk or taking a long time to come through)
- Student central has improved ‘a bit’

In SASS tutors post on their door the slots when they are available each week, for students to sign up. This works very well and it makes it straight forward to book a session

### **Action points for reps:**

Inductions / pre-course organisation. For students to succeed it is very important that they are able to properly prepare. This includes receiving accurate information about timetables, module content and reading lists.

Students joining the university have different needs to students progressing between years. Discuss with your course what they need from the induction period and whether the information you received was actually useful. Ask what works and whether they can identify any improvements for future years? Take these views to your course leader. Feedback any commitments made to your course.

Students comment upon the commitment and positive impact of staff. Tell them! Some staff may feel under appreciated. Their professionalism and community has been under attack by the increasing managerialism in HE. Also, what are the attributes that students really value? Discuss these with your course and consider nominating the staff that you feel deserve it for a Learning & Teaching award.

Issues of feedback and organisation were raised. It is noted that SASS has adopted a policy of returning work to student in 20 working days – 5 days more than university guidelines. Is this working for students? Does the extra week ensure the quality of feedback received helps students understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the work that has been assessed as well as offering guidance on how work might be improved for the future? Discuss students’ views on the feedback they have received on assessed work and take these views to the next course board.