

**Management response to 16 December 2005 USSU submission to Council**

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### **Vice-Chancellor's introduction**

Thank you for the clear and helpful presentation of student views and concerns which were set out in the document you presented to Council on 16 December. We appreciate the positive spirit in which they are offered, and the desire of students to improve how Sussex works.

We believe that the meetings which USSU and student reps have now had arising from the USSU submission with independent members of Council in January and with University senior management in early February – which discussed this management response in draft form – were positive and productive ones.

We welcome the fact that many of the issues raised in the submission are ones which we ourselves as a University are looking to address, and we would want to work with students to make progress on them, in the wide variety of specific ways set out in this document.

### **A detailed management response**

Out of respect for the effort and thought which has gone into the USSU submission, we have sought to respond in some detail. The approach in this management response has therefore been to try to set out some context for the issues raised – since a lot of these are complex issues which require a range of approaches if improvements are to be made.

We have sought to set out where action is going ahead which seeks to address the concerns expressed – and how we would want students to be involved in those discussions. We have identified the existing forums in which these issues can then be taken forward. Where new or different forums are needed, that is something we can discuss together.

We hope you recognise that we cannot in this document provide a blanket commitment on all the areas you have identified – for example on individual calls to increase USSU block grant, which need to be properly negotiated and discussed in the normal way.

We presented this document in draft to USSU and student reps in early February, so we could clarify any points in the final version. In response to the additional points then presented by USSU, we have attempted to amend and explain points throughout the document. Where any new points were raised, we have added new text to the end of each section.

We recognise that this makes the response long and detailed. We hope in practice this will mean it is a good and useful working document for USSU and the University as we work together in the future.

### **Specific action arising**

Each section has specific action points set out which we are intending to carry forward. In addition, we have drawn a summary of key action points at the beginning of this document. This summary does not represent the full set of actions taking place, nor is it meant to give undue prominence to some areas of action over others.

The summary of key action points is intended to be a useful and readable summary for students and staff who want to get a good understanding of some of the important action proposed in this management response to the USSU submission.

**We want to work with the USSU and the student community to address student issues consistently and thoroughly. We invite USSU Council to support the action set out in this document, so that we can work together on these issues for the benefit of students and the University as a whole.**

### **Building better engagement with USSU and students**

Going forward, we want to discuss how we can work to re-build trust with USSU and the student community. A key step will be to get formal USSU involvement and student representation right in the new committee structure which is being developed for 2006-07, where we will be working with you as set out in this document. Another will be to get the right formal and informal channels for engagement between USSU and Sussex management, where we have made specific proposals here.

The fact that you as a Union felt the need to take these issues collectively to Council suggests that work is needed to ensure that student views and feedback work effectively at all levels throughout the University, and we would want to discuss in the proposed new USSU-senior management discussions how those forums and feedback mechanisms can best be made to work well.

We would in particular suggest that we should look at existing forms of feedback on the overall student experience – in light of this USSU submission and NSS results – and see how those mechanisms can be improved and developed.

### **Commitment to working together**

As part of the next steps on all of this, we would invite USSU to develop and agree with us a joint statement to the student community reflecting a commitment to working together to meet the needs of students and the University. We would suggest that this agreement should be something which could be formally

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endorsed by Council at their meeting this term and monitored by them as we move forward together.

Professor Alasdair Smith  
**Vice-Chancellor**

10 February 2006

### **Key action points**

**We want to work with the USSU and the student community to address student issues consistently and thoroughly. We invite USSU Council to support the action set out in this document, so that we can work together on these issues for the benefit of students and the University as a whole.**

### **Joint statement**

We invite USSU to agree a joint statement with the University setting out the approach which shows the commitment both sides are making to this agenda for action, for endorsement by University Council this term.

### **Student Charter**

We are committed to creating a Student Charter setting out minimum standards for students. We propose to agree with USSU a process and timetable at the first USSU-senior management meeting this term.

### **USSU-Senior Management engagement**

We want to strengthen engagement between USSU and University senior management so that students have a stronger involvement with the management of the University. We propose to create a new forum with formal meetings twice a term between the VC's executive and the USSU sabbatical officers, starting with the first meeting this term.

### **Student representation**

We want to improve student representation and involvement on formal decision-making committees of the University. We are committed to a student rep on all committees, including the new Strategy and Resources Committee on which the President of the USSU will be a member. The Registrar and Secretary has invited the USSU President to discuss proposals for the new committee structure to be put to Senate and University Council for approval this term.

### **Senior management responsibility for the student experience**

We are committed to placing student experience at the heart of the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) appointment, with authority and accountability to carry forward and improve policy and practice. An appointment will be made to take effect from September 2006 at the latest.

### **Strategic planning investment**

We are committed to creating clear and transparent investment plans which focus on building academic strength at Sussex in research and teaching. Proposals will be put to Strategy and Resources Committee and then to Senate and Council in March. We will hold open meetings with students – on dates to be agreed with USSU – to explain these plans clearly.

### **Investment in facilities**

We are committed to a significant programme of investment to refurbish and re-equip teaching space and other facilities - starting with a £3m programme of work that will result in all teaching space being brought up to a high common standard. This will include the overhaul of Chichester Lecture Theatre by 2006-07, enhanced teaching space in Bramber House and major Arundel works by 2007. The costs and opportunities for the development of Mandela Hall are being urgently explored and we will discuss ways forward with USSU this term.

### **Student fee income**

We are committed to investing new student fee income in developing Sussex for the future – for example in student bursaries and scholarships, and additional academic posts. We will make a clear and definitive statement to the University community on this investment as part of the strategic plans presented in March.

### **Financial position**

We are committed to ensuring a clear and common understanding of the financial position of Sussex, and to provide a clear and transparent “resource allocation model” which shows how money is earned and money is spent, by all departments and support units at Sussex. These financial presentations will be made to Strategy and Resources Committee, Senate and Council in March. We will agree with USSU at the first termly meeting with senior management how these can best be presented in straightforward terms to the student community.

### **Contact time**

We are committed to ensuring that the current curriculum policy framework delivers the minimum standards of contact hours for all students. This policy is set out in the attached document. Where students are not receiving this minimum standard we are committed to rectifying this. We will this term hold a “base-camp” meeting with USSU and student reps, and involving directors of undergraduate studies, to explore the contact time issues identified by the USSU submission and to lay out an action plan to address them.

### **Associate Tutors**

We are committed to ensuring good and effective training and support for Associate Tutors. All the issues raised by the USSU submission will be discussed at the AT Monitoring Group on 13 March and a detailed response sent to the USSU Education Officer.

### **Computers**

We are committed to investing and improving the campus network and IT support. We are seeking to create a scheme for the lease and purchase of laptops for students. The Director of IT Services will report developments to USSU by Easter.

### **Library**

We are committed to protecting library spend on resources. We will explore with USSU how a system of "course packs" for students could improve access to materials.

### **Communication**

We are committed to improving communications with students. We will agree with USSU an overhaul of student information available on the web, starting with improved induction information for September 2006.

### **Student evaluation**

We are committed to enhancing student evaluation at Sussex, so that it looks across the wider student experience, not simply at course-level evaluation. We will agree with USSU at termly meetings with senior management a process and timetable for action to address this.

### **Academic support**

We are committed to improving the academic support provided to students at Sussex. As part of this, we will work with USSU to reform the personal tutor system. We will start those discussions with USSU this term. At a minimum we will improve at 2006 induction how students are introduced to the personal tutor system and the standards they have a right to expect.

### **Accommodation**

We are committed to a programme of new residences building starting immediately to meet student demand for housing, creating an additional 700+ beds from 2007. We are committed to ending the host family scheme from 2007.

We are committed to updating the clear statement of student rights as tenants, including repair standards, in the next "Living with us" document, after consultation with USSU.

### **Equality and diversity**

We are committed to recruiting new specialist staff to replace the Equalities Officer by Summer 2006, to maintain proactive work on equality and diversity issues.

### **Accessibility**

We stand behind our commitment to create a diverse student community, and our aim is that students should feel comfortable and satisfied that Sussex has adapted itself well to that diversity. We agree that access to extra-curricular activities is an important part of a rounded university experience. We will discuss with USSU in the new senior management meetings how to prioritise available resources in this area.

### **Catering**

We are committed to providing improved food and retail in Bramber House. The Director of Student Services will hold discussions this term with the USSU President and Finance Officer to review plans for Bramber House development.

### **Ethos**

We are committed to maintaining and enhancing the distinctive ethos of the University of Sussex. We will publish a clear statement on the "Spirit of Sussex" in the forthcoming University annual report to be presented to University Court in March. The University vision and values are at the centre of the strategic plan which is being developed and presented to Senate and University Council this year.

### **Council accountability**

We are committed to holding management to account for the commitments given in this document. We will ask the University Council to review progress against these action points in their summer 2006 and autumn 2006 meetings.

**Additional action**

This summary of key action points does not represent the full set of actions proposed, nor is it meant to give undue prominence to some areas of action over others. For additional points see the action heading in each section which follows.

## **Management of the University**

### **Background**

We recognise and welcome students' wish to understand and engage better with the decision-making and management arrangements for the University. At a time when those are undergoing change and reform to improve the running of the University, it's important that students are properly involved in these developments.

It is important to distinguish between (a) the policy and decision-making structures for the University – which are those arrangements which underpin Council and Senate, on which staff, students and office-holders are duly represented – and (b) the management arrangements which are in place at all levels from senior management through to School and departmental level, and within administrative units.

The management arrangements for Schools which were put in place in the run up to 2003 when new Schools and departments were created provide a clear set of accountabilities and responsibilities for Deans, Directors and Heads of Department, and for School Admin Managers and support staff working in the Schools.

These have in practice proved effective in articulating more clearly key roles and responsibilities within the University. A review of the new schools arrangements was carried out in 2004, lead by PVC Mary Stuart. The review was published in 2005 and is available on the VC's pages at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/vcoffice/>

The recommendations of the review were taken forward in developing processes and procedures for the University.

New proposals for (a) the formal committee decision-making arrangements for the University and (b) the senior management structures were set out in proposals to Senate and Council in December 2005. These should, amongst other things, strengthen and support the management arrangements in the Schools.

### **Action**

We welcome the Students' Union wish to see more robust management arrangements in place for the University, with clear lines of reporting and accountability.

We believe that the proposed arrangements set out in the papers to Senate and Council in December 2005, which articulate new decision-making structures

underpinning Senate and Council and new arrangements for executive management at senior levels, are the best way forward to achieve this.

Although the papers to Senate and Council in December set out the overall arrangements in some detail, we will happily discuss them further to clarify any points, in particular to ensure USSU understand the distinction and interaction between senior management arrangements (including VC's executive), and the formal decision-making structures.

We believe that the new arrangements will enhance decision-making and management at Sussex for the benefit of the whole campus community. We will happily work with USSU to consider what analysis would satisfactorily address the issue of the impact of the new arrangements on students.

Representation for students is being embedded in the new committees and representation on the new Strategy and Resources Committee – the key joint committee of Senate and Council – represents a significant strengthening compared to current arrangements.

A working group led by the Registrar and Secretary is now developing proposals for the committee structure, and he has invited the USSU to contribute to thinking on this. Arising from this, more detailed proposals for the committee structure will be presented to Senate and Council in March, and again in the summer term.

In relation to the student experience, the new structures provide a clear and direct role for oversight of policy on teaching and learning (through Senate), and for senior management for the issue (through the PVC lead).

Again, we will happily discuss this in detail with USSU, and as new PVCs are appointed and take up their roles, a close and productive working relationship with student representatives will be vital. The recruitment document setting out the proposed roles and responsibilities of the new PVCs was sent to the USSU President in early February 2006, as soon as it was available. That document explains the PVC role and responsibilities including line management responsibilities. We believe these developments will strengthen significantly the academic management of the University.

It would be helpful to discuss with the USSU what concerns they have in relation to the “academic-administrative relationship” since it is not wholly clear from the USSU submission what problems this is thought to give rise to in practice, nor is it clear that the characterisation of the relationship in the USSU submission is an entirely accurate reflection of the current arrangements.

The governance arrangements for the University, risk management, financial reporting arrangements and reporting to public funding bodies and so on, contain a range of audit procedures and independent assessment arrangements. We

would happily discuss in more detail the “checks and balances” which these give rise to, and look at where the USSU think these could be strengthened.

It would be normal practice for Council, in signing off new committee and management arrangements to agree a review process. We will happily take views from USSU, as proposals are developed, on the form and timing this might best take.

Finally, as set out below, we propose that new senior liaison arrangements should be established between USSU and senior management to ensure that there are clear and formal channels for discussion. We would suggest that all the issues identified above – concerning overall decision-making and management structures at Sussex – should be taken up as part of these discussions.

### **Forums for future discussions**

The SLA group – led by PVC Stuart – has acted as a very effective forum for considering USSU-specific issues, and has made significant progress on a wide range of issues, but has not had a sufficiently broad scope to look at all student issues.

We propose that there should now be meetings twice a term between the USSU sabbatical officers and the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive, which will provide a formal clearing house for USSU to raise and discuss issues concerning both USSU specific and student issues, starting from the Spring term 2006. This should strengthen significantly student engagement with senior management.

Proposals on committee structures will be presented to Senate and Council (on which students are represented) in March. In the run-up to that, the Registrar has invited USSU to discuss the development of these plans.

## **Financial position of the University**

### **Background**

The University at all levels is fully aware of the tight financial position which Sussex is in. The first and last points highlighted under “areas of concern” in the USSU submission are precisely what is motivating University to continue to take action. We started to tackle the underlying deficit position through savings review work, which was fully reported to campus in March 2005 (making clear where savings were being made in 2005-06 and that further savings would be needed for 2006-07), and now through new planning arrangements, which were reported to Senate and Council in December 2005.

The University has of course published annual accounts each year setting out in detail the financial position of the University, the most recent for 2004-05 were presented to University committees and Council in December. Details of the financial background to earlier financial planning rounds and decision-making were published in March 2005 and can be found at [www.sussex.ac.uk/finance/position](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/finance/position)

We are happy to provide reassurance to USSU on senior management salaries. The staff numbers referred to do not reflect growth in the numbers of, or pay of, senior staff running Sussex University. The four additional members of staff paid between £70-100k are wholly due to the reporting of Medical School salaries through the University accounts – clinical academic staff nationwide command higher salaries and are on separate pay arrangements. The BSMS has a separate ring-fenced budget and the pay of senior academic staff in BSMS has no effect on the current Sussex financial position: the posts are fully funded from the HEFCE grant for new student numbers in medicine.

### **Action**

Papers on a new strategic planning process and the development of a clear resource allocation model were presented to Senate and Council in December. A outline strategic plan for the development of the University, including opportunities for investment in staff and facilities, will be presented to Strategy and Resources Committee – on which USSU is represented – on 10 March, and then to Senate on 17 March and to Council on 24 March.

More detailed plans will then be developed and presented in the summer term. We will hold open meetings with staff and with students on the developing plans throughout this process. Those presentations and discussions will allow the most up to date information on future plans and financial background to be discussed and better understood by all sides.

The investment of top-up fee income is a critical part of investment decisions for the University and proposals for how they will be used will be presented to Strategy and Resources Committee. It is important that all parts of the University community understand the options for and the ways in which this investment will be made. (For 2006-07 additional fee income represents around £2.5m on top of total university income of around £110m.)

We can repeat to USSU that students will be represented on Strategy and Resources Committee, which will be the core joint committee of Council and Senate. This was one important part of the proposals for the new committee structures put forward by the Registrar. The first meeting of the Committee will be 10 March 2006.

The arrangements for improving staff pay and conditions are being taken forward through discussion and negotiation with the trades unions as part of the implementation of the framework agreement, and nationally through annual pay negotiations between employers and trades unions, in the normal way.

Energy efficiency is indeed being developed as a key University priority, as presentations to the Senior Management Group, Estates Sub-Committee, Finance & General Purposes Committee and to Council in the autumn term made clear. (The figures USSU present indeed derive from those presentations.) A range of practical proposals are being developed, including an energy efficiency campaign. We are working closely with USSU and environmental groups as this is taken forward – taking up student ideas and suggestions. For example, an energy awareness week is being held from Monday 20 February – see front page of Bulletin of 10 February 2006.

See separate section on the catering provision at Sussex. Although it would be desirable if the catering service revenues increased due to improved services to staff and students, this is not a core finance issue since Sussex's financial position is unlikely to be fundamentally altered by the potential scale of any enhanced profits from catering.

See also separate section on USSU block grant funding.

In relation to the Council strategy day in September 2005, we believe that the statement in the USSU submission was based on a misunderstanding: the President of the USSU was invited to and attended the Council event in September, reflecting his role as a member of Council.

### **Forums for future discussion**

The core of discussion with USSU in relation to future finance and planning for the University will be through Senate and Council, and through the new Strategy and Resources Committee on which USSU will be represented by the President.

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When matters concerning USSU budgets are being discussed, then USSU finance officers will of course be invited to attend.

We would also expect that the new twice-termly senior management-USSU meetings proposed in the management section would allow future issues concerning finances to be discussed in detail with management as well alongside these formal committee channels.

## Contact time

**This section sets out some of the context and complexity surrounding contact time and seeks to discuss in detail the issues raised by USSU. But we should make clear that we accept that there is a real issue here, with students in a number of areas concerned about the nature of contact within their programmes.**

**We will therefore want to work closely with USSU at to consider how we can address this issue, starting with a “base camp” meeting this term, which we want now to arrange with USSU.**

## Background

One of the principal aims of the University’s programmes of study is to equip students to become independent learners. Our emphasis is therefore on student learning. Equipping students to become autonomous and independent learners provides students not only with life-long learning skills but skills that are beneficial to subsequent employment.

The University redesigned the arts and social studies curriculum in 2003 to support this educational policy more effectively. Contact hours were doubled for first years and increased for second years so that there is a minimum expectation of:

- eight hours a week contact time at level 1;
- a minimum of six hours contact time at level 2; and
- four hours contact time in the final year as students increasingly become independent and self-directed learners.

At the same time, “reading weeks” (during which there was no contact time) were abolished thus increasing the volume of formal contact time over the whole year.

A crucial issue here is that student learning both can, and should, take place independently of contact time. Indeed the bulk of student learning whilst at university is achieved through independent/private study and interaction with other students.

The latest audit of teaching space from autumn 2005 shows the range of seminar group sizes which operate across the University (see annex page 63). These useful comparative data shows specifics for each school and averages for schools.

## **Action**

As will be apparent, this seemingly simply matter of contact time, raises complex issues of how teaching and learning best takes place in higher education. We suggest that we have detailed discussion with USSU around the issues raised by the submission, to develop a clear statement around expectations concerning the curriculum and student learning at Sussex.

**We propose to USSU that we start this discussion by holding a “base camp” meeting with the relevant Directors of Undergraduate Studies, the head of TLDU and the Director of Academic Support before the end of term, to start work on this.**

The current curriculum design for humanities and social sciences does indeed envisage that students should have two hours contact teaching per course as USSU suggest.

Proposals for specific commitments on a particular learning approach (either lectures or seminars) across all courses are a useful starting point for discussion – but the nature of the teaching and learning process is a complex one. The University is committed to providing a range of teaching and learning experiences to support students in their studies.

Part of the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy is to establish more effective large group teaching; this can involve opportunities for interactive participation by individuals or breakout groups of small numbers of students within the overall framework of a large group activity. This promotes active learning, since it allows students to discuss topics in more detail, can help to clarify concepts introduced in the lecture and provide more immediate feedback on their learning.

We are encouraging and promoting learning, teaching and assessment activities that will embrace group work or act as a catalyst for a range of activities outside formal contact time. For instance, group projects and presentations are adopted on many programmes and students on a number of courses have the opportunity to access online quizzes and group discussion that help to support face-to-face learning.

We are keen to promote peer-learning (where, for example, students in their second year provide guidance and support to students in the first year) which is known to be effective in addressing student queries and problems in a prompt and supportive manner and which also proves beneficial to the “older “ group of students in consolidating and crystallizing their knowledge.

We also want to spread opportunities for peer assessment more widely; this is widely recognised as good practice in the sector as the process of one student

providing feedback on another student's piece of work as a class activity not only promotes a much deeper understanding of assessment requirements and assessment criteria as the student has to learn how to apply them but it has the double benefit of supplying immediate feedback and opportunity for discussion to the student being "assessed".

Teaching and Learning methods and curriculum structure and design are reviewed at internal periodic subject reviews in which two external assessors are involved and at which views are sought from students across the range and years of a department's programmes.

It is, for example, absolutely clear that we need to ensure that student expectations are appropriate as they embark on their studies each year.

The University will take steps to ensure, at departmental induction, and in subsequent years of study that students are engaged with the design of their programme and their progression through it, that they understand how the teaching and learning methods will deliver the learning outcomes and that they are fully briefed and understand how they need to learn.

Schools are being asked to develop learning, teaching and assessment strategies which will focus on the delivery of more effective teaching and learning methods and more efficient assessment which will reduce the burden of end of course assessment and allow more time for students to receive feedback from teachers and peers during the course.

We will address promotional material and course handbooks to ensure that this information is updated, is accurate and is appropriately foregrounded.

### **Forums for future discussion**

**At the new senior management-USSU meetings which start this spring term, we will want to agree with USSU what are the appropriate forums and ways in which we can consider and address this issue of contact time.**

The current arrangements are:

School Curriculum Committees currently hold the responsibility for approval of the learning and teaching methods for courses and a student representative is a member of each of these committees.

Students who have concerns about the learning and teaching strategies employed for their programmes can raise the matter directly with the Head of their Department.

They can use the Student Representative Scheme to raise the issue at departmental meetings or at School Curriculum Committee meetings or at the School Student Forum meeting. (It is of course best to raise the matter first at departmental level.)

At University-wide level, the USSU Education Officer serves on Taught Programmes Committee and issues of principle can be raised there via student representatives.

### **Further clarification on contact time**

In light of the management response above, USSU presented a detailed range of questions (on Tuesday 7 February) seeking further information and clarification on contact time. The following Q&A are an initial attempt to respond in detail to those questions.

**We hope that the “base camp” meeting on contact time proposed above will allow these issues to be better debated and understood between students and staff, and provide a starting point for moving this issue forward in a positive way for staff and students.**

USSU Q1. The response says that contact hours ‘were doubled for first years and increased for second years’ in 2003. However, the minimal contact time for many is not undertaken by academic staff but PG students so the quality of contact is weak. We are not saying that PG tutors should not be used, but a student should not have the bulk of their teaching delivered in this manner.

A. We would be happy to discuss with you further the programmes where you feel that the bulk of teaching is delivered by postgraduate tutors. We would also welcome further discussion about the evidence that underpins your assumption that the ‘quality of contact is weak’ with associate tutors.

USSUQ2. What does the University think are the components of a quality education? Independent learning, large group teaching and peer learning and assessment? Why should students opt for Sussex over the Open University? What more does it have to offer?

USSUQ4. Independent work is an important *part* of education but the University also needs to recognise that a) there is a big gap between A levels and University, which means first years are likely to find it tough, b) this is likely to be even more of a jump for people from non-traditional backgrounds, so we need to look at it seriously from a WP viewpoint.

USSUQ5. Although independent learning increases in the final year, this doesn’t mean that contact time should decrease. All years should have a

minimum of eight hours a week. The contact time should just be a different type of contact time in the final year – individual meetings with academics and dissertation workshops for example. Replacing a 3-hour a week course with a dissertation that only has 15-minutes of contact time for the *whole term* is not acceptable.

USSUQ6. The importance lies not just in the total amount of contact time, but the amount and quality of contact for each course. We believe there should be a minimum of two *close* contact hours per course (e.g. seminars, tutorials). This is in *addition* to a minimum of an hour lecture. One-hour seminars are being run in the Arts subjects and this is not acceptable. There is a real concern from Arts students that their courses are not allocated sufficient time, and there is not enough time to fully discuss the issues with an expert. All the students we have spoken to and received comments from were extremely positive about seminars and tutorials as a learning format – the essential message being that if they could only choose one learning format (and this seems to be the case for arts students at least) that they would want small-group. This could be in the lab, a seminar, a tutorial or any other method, as this is what students feel is most helpful. We need a commitment from the University to say it also values and will protect small-group teaching.

A. As we have noted in the main response, the issue about how teaching and learning takes place in higher education is a complex one. There will inevitably be differences in approach between disciplines and between years of study. The real issue here is ensuring that students have a high quality learning experience which enables them to achieve the outcomes identified for their programmes of study rather than to focus on broad commitments to particular teaching methods (for instance, we do not necessarily think that a lecture is necessarily the best method of delivering learning in all circumstances and would prefer to see a more diverse range of large group teaching methods). The university's learning and teaching policy 2003-2006 (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/tldu/documents/ltpolicy.pdf>) makes a clear statement about the components of a quality education at Sussex. This policy was drafted by members of faculty from across the university with input from the Education Officer of the Student's Union. We would propose that we pursue these issues through the discussion which we are proposing above and we are committed to arranging a meeting before the end of term.

USSUQ3 Students can't forge relationships with other students to partake in independent group work if they hardly ever see each other.

A. Where we have discussed group activities and group work as part of formal teaching and learning activities these would be structured and managed by the course convenor and not left to the students to organise.

USSUQ7. Although the University has abolished reading weeks, many courses are briefly introduced in Week 1 and then finish in Week 9, resulting in only 8-weeks of teaching time. A 10-week term should be a 10-week term.

A. We agree that there needs to be clear agreement on teaching weeks and weeks when assessment takes place.

USSUQ8. *'We are encouraging and promoting learning, teaching and assessment activities that will embrace group work or act as a catalyst for a range of activities outside formal contact time'* – How? Where is this being implemented? Why not mandatory and across the board? How about training workshops for tutors about different teaching and learning techniques?

A. The Teaching and Learning Development Unit does provide development and training in a range of teaching and learning techniques. Organising workshops is not as effective as bespoke work with individual departments. TLDU has been working closely with all the departments in SciTech and LifeSci as part of the Science Curriculum Reform Project and many of the developments are being implemented for current years as well as for the 2006 entrants. In addition, TLDU staff have been working closely with selected departments in Humanities and SI (for example Law and Art History)

USSUQ9. In the response it says that peer learning and peer assessment is *'known to be effective'* and *'recognised as good practice'*. Where is this proven? The results of the NSS show a different view. Any peer learning and assessment should be additional to core teaching and it should never be the result of tutors not having the time to mark essays or due to cost saving measures.

A. We think there is a misunderstanding here. The NSS did not address peer learning or peer assessment. It is indeed the case that peer learning and peer assessment form part of an overall set of teaching and learning activities and are not a substitute for formative and summative assessment by staff. These learning activities have been strongly promoted by the LTSN (and their subject centres) and now by the Higher Education Academy. Many studies at other universities have demonstrated that peer learning can support the student learning experience. We have evidence at Sussex of how successful these techniques can be. In the Department of Engineering and Design peer assessment was introduced as part of the course Dynamics and there was a demonstrable improvement in the mean mark achieved by students in the summative assessment.

USSUQ11. When do the internal periodic subject reviews take place? When are the next ones? Are students involved, and if so how?

A. Internal periodic subject reviews take place once every five to six years. The periodic review timetable is at

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/academic/academicoffice/pdrev/index.shtml>

All periodic review events include an interview with a sample of students representing the range of years and the range of programmes.

USSU Q12. *'Schools are being asked to develop learning, teaching and assessment strategies'* – When will they be done by? Will students be involved, and if so how? Will the strategies be in the public domain?

A. The Schools have been asked to develop learning, teaching and assessment strategies which will in due course be in the public domain. Work is currently on hold pending the development of the University's new Corporate Plan from which a revised institutional teaching and learning strategy will follow and School strategies will key into this. We would welcome student involvement in this process and would expect that school strategies will be developed over the next 12 to 18 months.

USSU Q13 *'School Curriculum Committees'* - What steps are the University taking to ensure that these student representatives are fully briefed by appropriate staff on their role and supported in it? Does this constitute a guarantee that student concerns will be listened to and acted upon?

A. Student representatives are provided with a briefing on their role early in the academic year in which the University's involved. Student representatives are encouraged to contact the secretaries of departmental or School committees on which they serve so that they can talk through the agenda and understand the process. School staff are encouraged to facilitate this process. The University-level committees have established regular contact between the secretaries and the Student Union representatives.

USSUQ14. *Using the Student Representative Scheme* - How are the University planning to ensure all students are aware of this feedback mechanism? What resources are the University committing to the scheme?

A. The Student Representatives Scheme is widely publicised at the start of each academic year (in student and staff newspapers, posters, leaflets and the Academic Office website <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-4-2.html> in addition to the USSU website). There were two mass emails to students. School staff work actively to support the process of elections and departments are updated on the outcomes. The scheme is covered in the general student handbook and also flagged in School publications. A member of the Academic Office has been working closely with the Education Officer of USSU to support the scheme.

USSU Q15. USSU Education Officer - So have the University considered the current Education Officer's proposal to TPC concerning the insufficiency of one person representing such a diverse range of students on taught courses, and has taken steps to either provide more representation in the form of student reps, or changed the time so it no longer clashes with other committees and consultative groups of which the Officer is a member?

A. A new committee system is being established as from 2006/7 and discussions will take place about student representation on the new structure. For the remainder of committee meetings in the current year we can discuss arranging a substitute if the Education Officer cannot attend TPC.

USSU Q16. *'Students who have concerns about the learning and teaching strategies employed for their programme can raise the matter directly with the Head of their department'* – Where are the strategies? Students don't know they can complain about strategies they are not told about.

A. The learning and teaching methods for individual courses and a description of the learning and teaching strategy for the programme are published as part of programme specifications on Sussex Direct. This information is also available in programme handbooks.

USSU Q17. Compulsory study skills should be part of programmes or built into courses, as it is important to help embed study skills from day one.

A. We suggest that the issue of study skills is discussed as part of the meeting to which we refer. There are some examples within the University, such as the Department of Biochemistry, where skills have been embedded successfully within programmes.

USSU Supplementary Q *'Although there is a policy regarding minimum contact time, there are students with only four hours contact time in the first year and two hours in the final year. What monitoring measures are in place to ensure that what is written down in policy actually happens? If students are being allocated less than the minimum, what is the procedure for rectifying this?'*

A. We are committed to addressing concerns and would want to discuss as a matter of urgency with USSU where these problems are arising.

## **Associate tutors**

### **Background**

As a research-intensive university we have a significant population of research degree students who provide a vibrant pool of talent as potential associate tutors (ATs). Like most other research-intensive universities we find it both to the benefit of our students to have some of their tuition provided by young researchers and also to the benefit of the research degree students to acquire teaching skills and experience. The involvement of postgraduate research degree students in learning and teaching in areas related to their research can help integrate research informed teaching at all levels.

The University has a policy which governs the quality assurance and employment of associate tutors, see:

[www.sussex.ac.uk/associatetutors/docs/policy/APSC\\_policy.pdf](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/associatetutors/docs/policy/APSC_policy.pdf)

While the core issues here are the preparation and provision of ATs, it is important to be clear about the scale of their role. For the autumn term 2005, just over 500 ATs were used by Sussex, each delivering on average about 4-5 hours undergraduate tuition each week.

### **Action**

In the sections that follow, we have gone into the concerns raised in some detail, because a great deal of action and attention has been paid to the issue of Associate Tutors in recent years. We believe that all the issues raised by the USSU are covered.

**However, we propose to take USSU'S submission and additional comments to the Associate Tutors' Monitoring Group, which meets in the week beginning 13 February. We will provide formal feedback to USSU sabbatical officers on the outcomes of this discussion.**

### **Training of Associate Tutors**

All associate tutors with less than three years experience of teaching are required to undertake the "Associate Tutors Training Programme" for which they are paid at the agreed rate. Departments are asked to notify the TLDU of associate tutors falling within this category.

A separate training course for those Associate Tutors with a demonstrating role (primarily those in the science schools) was developed two years ago. Over time, as a result of participant feedback, there has been a shift in emphasis from the theoretical aspects of teaching and learning to a more practical based content. During the last iteration of the course, a number of experienced Associate Tutors

attended part of the session to help support new tutors with the very practical aspects of the role.

In both cases the programme philosophy is one of active learning, supported through experiential, participative learning activities designed to enable participants to move through cycles of learning characterised by experience, reflection, theorising and testing and the course is delivered in a series of workshops during the period of teaching to allow time for the above cycle to take place. Those providing central training are also working closely with departments and schools to ensure that Associate Tutors are given an appropriate level of central and local induction into their role.

All associate tutors must be appropriately inducted by the department employing them and the relevant course convenor is responsible for providing guidance and support to the associate tutors employed. The University recommends that it is good practice to provide mentoring for all associate tutors with less than three years teaching experience and mentors must be provided for postgraduate research degree students appointed as associate tutors. It is also part of the University's policy that teaching by associate tutors must be observed (on a sampling basis) as part of the departmental arrangements for peer-observation of teaching).

### **Payments for ATs**

The hourly rates are inclusive of preparation time for teaching, for summative assessment and for associated administration - see:

[www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/personnl/termcond/assoctut\\_tc.pdf](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/personnl/termcond/assoctut_tc.pdf)

### **Use of ATs to complement teaching**

The University issues guidance on good practice in the strategic deployment of associate tutors and recommends that associate tutors should be used in teams with permanent staff. The usual role for associate tutors is to complement and support large group teaching undertaken by permanent staff. It is a requirement that postgraduate research degree students acting as associate tutors should be appointed as part of a course team which should include a permanent member of academic staff as the convenor.

### **Office hours**

ATs are not limited to one office hour a week but Schools are asked to enable tutors to hold appropriate office hours at which they can provide students with feedback.

### **Resources for ATs**

Schools are required to provide the resources necessary for associate tutors to undertake their teaching duties including access to appropriate workspace, photocopying, library, computing and IT facilities. They do not however have an entitlement to office space or secretarial support. Thus they should be given access to the relevant information and resources in order to undertake their teaching effectively.

It is a formal requirement that at departmental and School level there should be a named responsible member of staff who will oversee matters relating to associate tutors within that department and within that School. At departmental level this role may be undertaken by the Head of Department.

A list of relevant contacts is available on the associate tutors' webpage:  
[www.sussex.ac.uk/associatetutors](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/associatetutors)

This will be updated to reflect comments and suggestions presented by USSU.

The web page was established at the beginning of this academic year in order to provide a single source of information for all matters related to associate tutors (both for associate tutors themselves, Heads of Departments and other faculty responsible for their management). This includes the policies alluded to above.

### **Forums for future discussion**

Two years ago the University set up an Associate Tutors Monitoring Group which has reported annually to Senate on the implementation and development of the Associate Tutors policy and associated employment arrangements. The Group monitors implementation of policy and emerging problems and reports to APSC and Senate.

Good progress has been made on establishing secure and effective employment procedures, confirming duties which may be expected of associate tutors, identifying, refining and approving training opportunities and requirements and ensuring that associate tutors are for discussion as a regular item of business at departmental, school and University levels. There will continue to be a need to review the arrangements in place in Schools to ensure that there are effective mentoring and observation arrangements in place and that there are appropriate strategies for the deployment of associate tutors.

If students have concerns about teaching by associate tutors they should in the first instance contact the member of staff (normally the Head of Department) who oversees matters relating to associate tutors within the department. Substantial or generic concerns can be conveyed to Carol Kedward, the Chair of the Associate Tutors' Monitoring Group.

**Further clarification on associate tutors**

In light of the management response above, USSU presented a number of questions (on Tuesday 7 February) seeking further information and clarification on ATs. All the issues raised will be taken to the Associate Tutors' Monitoring Group and feedback given to USSU.

In relation to training, we would however welcome more information on the numbers of ATs who have expressed concern that the training is too theoretical.

In 2004/05, a separate strand was developed for those Associate Tutors with a more limited teaching role. It was aimed primarily at those associate tutors in the two science schools, who are involved demonstrating in practical settings and undertake some marking of assessments.

This 'demonstrators programme' has been further refined this academic year and is now run as a one day session, with the focus very much on supporting new associate tutors in the very practical skills associated with practical science teaching. Experienced demonstrators now attend the session and work with small groups of trainee tutors within their discipline and assist them with issues that are most relevant within their context. The participant feedback on this new structure has been very positive and can be accessed here <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/tldu/1-5-5-3.html>

The Associate Tutors Training Programme has recently received accreditation through the Higher Education Academy that will allow those who complete the requirements to claim Associate Practitioner Status.

## **Library**

### **Background**

We recognise that students need confidence in the provision of information resources through the library and other forms to support their studies. We believe that we offer and run a responsive service, but are keen to explore with students how we can further improve it. We are also alert to the need to protect spend on books and other resources, and to prioritise spend to match University needs. Again, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss how we make such decisions.

Library spend was £3.5m in 2003-04, £3.7m in 2004-05 and is forecast to be £3.8m in 2005-06. Total spend on resources (books, journals, electronic access, AV etc) has increased from £1.3m in 2003-04 to £1.6m this year.

### **Action**

#### **Electronic resources**

In line with our Strategic Plan ([www.sussex.ac.uk/library/aboutus/aboutus.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/aboutus/aboutus.html)), we are increasing electronic access to core materials as far as possible to meet short-term heavy demand for certain materials. For example, if a single chapter from a textbook is needed by a large number of students we shall, if we can, make it available electronically.

We work on the assumption that students will buy their own copies of the textbooks which are core to their programmes. We will happily discuss with USSU how we could analyse the realistic costs of textbook purchases for individual programmes, to help inform future decision-making on programme design, to ensure there are reasonable expectations about costs.

Journal articles are recommended as core reading, whether in electronic or print format, for pedagogical, not financial, reasons. Science undergraduates have always been expected to read journal articles to find out the most up to date information. The only difference is that now more and more journals are available electronically. This greatly improves access by making most material available 24 hours a day, even when the Library building is closed.

It is for students to decide whether to read the material on screen or to print it out. We will happily explore with USSU issues in relation to scanners – but would need to discuss further to understand the concerns expressed here. Hard copy journals cannot be taken home – so the issue of having these at home does not arise.

### **Treating the library as an “academic unit”**

The Library budget is set each year according to the resources of University and in the light of an assessment of the needs of the teaching and research mission of University. The new resource allocation model which is being developed identifies resources for departments based on their teaching load, research staff etc. The funding of the library is not amenable to this approach. However, treating it as an “academic unit” would not mean any greater or lesser share of the resource available. What matters is getting right funds for the Library and spending them in the right way. As noted above, the library budget has continued to increase year on year – and spend per student is actually in line with similar UK universities.

### **Library budget**

Library spend was £3.5m in 2003-04, £3.7m in 2004-05 and is forecast to be £3.8m in 2005-06. Total spend on resources (books, journals, electronic access, AV etc) has increased from £1.3m in 2003-04 to £1.6m this year. There persists in a myth that library resources are being “cut” – and want to ensure students understand that budgets have increased year on year.

### **Opening hours**

We piloted extending our opening hours with restricted services but received negative feedback from students, who wanted access to all services whenever the Library was open. In the light of this we opened later in the evenings on weekdays and earlier in the morning at the weekends. Usage during these extended opening hours was extremely low.

We have subsequently explored a number of variations and made changes in the light of usage statistics and feedback from staff and students. Increasing opening hours is very costly and cannot be justified given the very low use made of the Library during these times.

We have meanwhile also extended Library opening at peak times e.g. during the Easter vacation and immediately before exams. This has proved to be very popular.

### **Resources for students**

We are currently working closely with teaching faculty to review the way we provide resources for students. We will happily discuss with USSU through the library consultative group how this operates and is being developed.

We are focusing particularly on the way we handle reading lists for individual courses, to improve the availability of appropriate materials for course. This includes helping ensure that Schools and departments understand the current availability and supply of books in planning their required and suggested course materials.

The requirement to prepare reading lists rests with Departments. The library works with academics to support this. Where students have concerns around reading lists we will of course work through the forums identified below to address specific problems.

We are meanwhile considering how we can best support large cohorts of students without spending a disproportionately large amount of our budget on multiple copies of individual titles.

We are also thinking about expanding our reserve collection to meet sporadic heavy demand for specific titles. This would reduce the need for multiple copies.

### **Shelving**

We do all we can to re-shelve material promptly but, like many other libraries, we find it difficult to keep up with the volume of material returned at busy times. Books awaiting final shelving are always kept in order on trolleys located on the right floor: Students are encouraged to check the trolleys if they fail to find the titles they need on the shelves. We do employ casual student workers within the library – but of course at peak study times during the year students are understandably less available for work.

### **Forums for future discussion**

We note that USSU have raised additional points in response to the draft management response – most of which we have sought to address in this final version. However, concerns were express about a range of issues – including the nature of staffing support within the library, which we would want to understand better. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this in more detail so we can understand the real nature of concerns and identify how they can best be addressed.

Issues can be raised directly with the Librarian, Debby Shorley, and the senior library management through the USSU education officer or department library reps (academic). The names of the library representatives in each Department are listed on our webpage at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/informationfor/repstlist.html>.

There is also a University-wide Library Consultative Group which normally meets termly. The student representatives on the library consultative group can be found at

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/gen\\_info/lcg/](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/library/gen_info/lcg/)

Individual students can make suggestions/comments through the library suggestions scheme - cards available at service points in the Library. Online suggestions form on the library website plus a separate enquiries form for students with questions about access information for their course – all accessible in the 'contact us' area linked from the homepage. Comments through these channels have already led to significant service improvements.

## **Computers**

### **Background**

We recognise that access to appropriate and effective IT resources and support is critical for students and their successful learning experience. As with other areas of provision, we are keen to ensure USSU and student reps understand and can engage with the complex nature of how IT provision is planned and provided.

The University has continued to invest in computing support for students in recent years, including: extra open-access PCs (through which we provide students with free internet and email access); regular upgrading of equipment; spreading the wireless network, the introduction of the kiosk service and Sussex Direct. Looking just at PC facilities, these have increased from 480 in 2002 to 505 open-access and 26 kiosk PCs currently. We are in the process of completing the networking of campus student accommodation.

The fact is that PC ownership combined with fast Internet access is becoming ubiquitous for academic and professional life in the UK. Students understand the benefits of owning a PC and this is why the great majority of Sussex students now arrive with or quickly acquire their own PCs/laptops. Of course, we recognise that this is a real issue for those from less well-off backgrounds, and we intend to help further to address this.

Private PC ownership by students has already moved so far that it makes no sense for the University to invest ITS resource simply to increase the provision of on-campus fixed PC clusters which would go unused. Instead we envisage a general (but gradual) change of emphasis towards improving both on- and off-campus connectivity, creating more mixed-use wireless-networked spaces in which students can both work and relax, and improving the services and virtual learning resources available when students log on.

This does not mean that PC clusters will disappear: for the foreseeable future we will need a range of them, both for students in need of temporary on-campus access, and for PC-based teaching and training requiring the cluster-type format.

Improvements that have happened recently include:

- Comprehensive online information on the ITS web-pages on PC cluster room location and current availability (information which is displayed on monitors in the Library, ITS foyer and Pevensey IB4; also accessible via kiosk PCs);
- Improvements to Sussex Direct, linking direct from students' timetable pages to the ITS information about PC cluster rooms.

It is difficult to give precise ratios of use of open-access PCs. Overall average usage is rarely more than 80%; at peak times before deadlines this rises, but even at the busiest times there are almost always some spare places, if the student is prepared to make a short walk across campus to find it.

### **Action**

We welcome the specific suggestions offered by USSU and continue to look to how service improvements can be made. This section therefore takes the suggestions made in the USSU submission in turn.

The machines themselves register electronically most faults to a central service point. To test each machine to a more significant level would involve actual diagnostic work in person at each machine and would be unfeasibly expensive and disruptive. We do take these steps when a machine reports itself or when a person reports a problem.

We agree that better advertising/signposting of the less obvious cluster rooms, and better advertising of the ITS facility that shows current PC cluster availability would be helpful. We will post weekly timetables outside PC cluster rooms so that students can take note of sessions in the week that are pre-booked for teaching events. We would welcome suggestions and ideas from students as to how this could be improved further.

As explained above, rather than dedicate more space to cluster rooms the plan is to enable more wireless connectivity, both on and off campus, matching student demand.

We will continue to give strong encouragement for students to use approved machines purchased/leased under advice from the University.

We do intend to introduce a scheme for student purchase/leasing at attractive rates. The Director of ITS is already progressing a scheme which will be piloted during the latter part of this academic year. We look forward to discussing this with USSU and students.

We will confirm that mitigating evidence processes can take on board major and confirmed issues, especially file storage failures on University servers. Broadly speaking, we believe that Sussex policy on this is in line with the sector norm. We will discuss further with USSU the detail of how this operates (eg how to define what 'computer failure' includes, how policy sits alongside other mishaps (travel delays) etc, to ensure is fair and consistent for all students).

### **Forums for future discussion**

For general University policy and level of investment, this discussion should be continuing in the main USSU-central management forum which will be developed with USSU.

The new Learning & Teaching Committee, on which students will be represented, deals with issues concerning the relationship between computing and the academic framework, mitigating evidence etc.

The IT Consultative Committee, which has three new student reps, deals with specific IT concerns and priorities, and is already proving a productive forum for discussion.

### **Further clarification on computers**

In light of the management response above, USSU presented a number of range of comments (on Tuesday 7 February) on computers. The following Q&A respond in detail to those questions.

USSU Q1. *'To test each machine to a more significant level would involve actual diagnostic work in person at each machine and would be unfeasibly expensive and disruptive.'* A lot of the time people put a note on the computer if it's broken, it wouldn't actually be a chore for someone to check for these when refilling printers.

A. This is useful input. We will check the room for notes and use them as if they were fault reports. It would be helpful if they could contain contact details so we can follow up properly.

USSU Q2. *'We would welcome suggestions and ideas from students as to how this could be improved further'* Putting the timetables on the website as well, designing larger posters with a map of all computer rooms in the area and how many computers are in each area – e.g. Library – details of the small computer rooms in Arts B/C/D. Also wireless areas like the Grapevine Bar should be much wider publicized through posters and emails to students.

A. These are good suggestions. We will get these ready for the re-signing needed when ITS moves building next term.

USSU Q3. *'The Director of ITS is already progressing a scheme which will be piloted during the latter part of this academic year'*. This is a great idea. When this year will we hear about it and who will the Director contact with details?

A. Trevor Potten is working on a deal for students which will be very attractive. He hopes to have details available before Easter. We will publicise the

scheme very widely when we have details.

USSU Q4. *'The new Learning & Teaching Committee, on which students will be represented, deals with issues concerning the relationship between computing and the academic framework, mitigating evidence etc'*. Who is our contact for the rest of this year?

A. Contact Trevor Potten (Director of IT), Owen Richards (Academic Registrar) and Sarah Butler (Director of Academic Support)

## Communication

**As a section, this focuses on communication relating to course and assessment changes. But we want to flag here that all the forums identified throughout this document provide for the discussion and resolution of issues as they arise. The fact that USSU have felt the need to raise issues in submission to Council suggests the forums have not operated as effectively as they should. We would want to work with USSU to ensure those forums do indeed work effectively, since they are important for the good running of the University and for students own teaching and learning experience.**

## Background

This section focuses on the (very important) area of communicating course and assessment changes. The University has sought to put more effort into better general communications and liaison with USSU in recent years. Where we can make further improvements we will continue to do so and welcome suggestions and ideas for this.

The curriculum for the forthcoming year, including assessment modes, is published to students in programme handbooks on an annual basis. The full structure of degree programmes, related to each of the relevant entrants' cohorts, is available in the form of programme specifications on the web.

Interdisciplinary programme elements such as Cultural Studies are more challenging to offer and manage because they depend on input from a range of different departments and are not solely within the purview of a single department. Schools of Studies however are committed to providing programme elements of this type and interdisciplinarity is a characteristic of the provision in Arts Schools, notably in SocCul.

The Psychology case study cited *is* an interesting example of where communications have clearly not helped students to understand the nature and reason for the current position, which for completeness is as follows.

The reason why Taught Programmes Committee (on which USSU is represented) agreed in 2005 to a moratorium on further moves towards running mid-year unseen examinations was precisely to protect students from the unforeseen consequences of well-intentioned proposals.

Several departments, including English and Psychology, have sought to move summer-term exams to mid-year in order to spread the assessment load on students. The intention is good, and much effort has been put into seeing if it can be facilitated, but the same problem keeps arising.

It is practically impossible to schedule set-piece unseen exams in mid-year, in the absence of a cross-university exams schedule of the kind we have in the summer term, without the new exams for specific individual courses disrupting the teaching or assessment for other courses that the students are taking.

Depending on the pattern of syllabus connections, it quickly becomes unfeasibly complex to ensure that no students are disadvantaged. If a subject area (ideally a School) produces a proposal that is fully thought-through in this regard, it will be reconsidered, but none have so far satisfactorily addressed the problem. There is understandably no support from Schools for the idea of creating a cross-university mid-year exams schedule in which no teaching would take place, just to facilitate assessment for a small minority of courses. Therefore, what departments have been encouraged to do is examine other ways of achieving the same aim of spreading student assessment load, by considering other modes of assessment.

The University has no requirements that assessment should be entirely by unseen examination and indeed would recommend that a variety of assessment modes are adopted subject to the requirements of professional and statutory bodies. In the example of Psychology, the second year core comprises required courses for professional accreditation. Assessment strategies are determined locally and it is a matter for individual departments to review.

The University does need central policies on when formal unseen examinations can take place because this affects the time at which other teaching taken by students involved can occur.

### **Action**

We would find it helpful to discuss with USSU how existing communication systems and approaches could be enhanced or improved to address concerns. It is worth noting that both issues identified in case studies should have been addressed at departmental level, and we would want to discuss with USSU possible reasons why this has not been satisfactorily achieved, with the aim of improving those feedback mechanisms.

We suggest this is addressed specifically in the new USSU-senior management meetings proposed in the "management" section.

Changes to programmes and assessment have to be discussed at departmental meetings and approved at School Curriculum Committees. There are student representatives at both these meetings and the Student Representative Scheme should be used as a mechanism whereby students can be consulted about potential future changes to programmes. It is good practice for departments to consult their students locally about potential changes.

Any changes to an individual course or assessment or to the structure of a programme once the curriculum for the year has been published cannot be implemented without the written consent of the students concerned. If the USSU hears of cases that break this policy, we welcome this being escalated.

The practical problems with exam venues, to which the submission incorrectly attributes the blockage in the case of psychology, are real but subsidiary. The problem with Mandela Hall relates to heating (it does have radiators but they are inadequate and not easily brought up to standard); the problem with the Sports Halls is the disruption of external booking contracts made well in advance. The only other possible venue is Bramber, which presents further issues. It has been made clear throughout that, with reasonable notice, the venue problems could be resolved. But it would clearly not be sensible to incur the costs involved in resolving the venue problems without first having clarity on the management of curriculum and assessment issues discussed above.

Any improvement of Mandela Hall for exams will need to be part of a more general upgrading plan; this is already under discussion and being costed.

### **Forums for future discussion**

As is clear from some of the necessary complexity of the discussion above, it might be helpful to have specific discussions with USSU to ensure that student community properly understands issues concerning exam venues and timetabling.

As noted above, changes to programmes and assessment have to be discussed at departmental meetings and approved at School Curriculum Committees. There are student representatives at both these meetings and the Student Representative Scheme should be used as a mechanism whereby students can be consulted about potential future changes to programmes.

Concerns which students have about course changes should be raised either via the student reps scheme or directly with the Head of Department.

The School Student Forums would be an appropriate place to raise concerns either about the types of issues cited (for Cultural Studies or about Psychology Assessment).

## Communication

USSU Q1. More action needs to happen to make the running of the University transparent.

A. We agree. The detail set out in this whole response to the concerns raised by USSU is one example of our intention to do this. Much more significant are the reforms of management structures and committee decision-making set out in the management section. The need to demonstrate and replicate this transparency in communication systems – such as the email and intranet – is understood. We will want to work with USSU on issues like reforming and developing the web “information for students” and Sussex Direct.

USSU Q2. A large problem is the means of communication within the schools. It is almost impossible for schools and departments to communicate with students via large email groups because of University restrictions. A better policy and support for this mode of communication needs to be found.

A. There are in fact well-developed email systems and protocols which are working increasingly effectively. To the extent there are “University restrictions” on mass emailing they exist primarily to prevent email overload and badly directed communications. We would want to explore with USSU how targeted emailing and other communication systems could help with information flows to students.

*USSU Q5. School Student Forums* – These don’t always happen.

A. We will happily work with USSU to develop an effective system of School Student Forums if these are the right mechanisms for effective student input.

*USSU Q6. Student Reps* – Over reliance on a scheme that is not properly supported by the University. The University needs to share more of the cost of the scheme; make the student rep the remit of more than one staff member; and implement ways to enforce the student reps policy.

A. We have been working to support the long-standing USSU initiative for improving the student reps scheme. We will happily discuss further how this could sensibly be strengthened.

## **Personal tutors**

### **Background**

Personal Tutoring is the responsibility of the academic departments and all permanent members of academic staff are expected to act as Personal Tutors. The general expectation is that Personal Tutors have an overview of their tutees academic progress, maintain an agreed time each week when any personal tutees may sign up to see them and they will have group meetings with students in the first year.

The University is of course already looking at issues concerning academic support, including personal tutoring, which arise from the NSS 2005. Directors of Student Support together with colleagues in Student Services teams are keen to address this issue.

Under the current committee structure, the Student Support and Progress Committee determines policy and procedures for personal tutoring under its chair who is the PVC responsible for student support and welfare. This committee (which comprises the Directors of Student Support in each School, the USSU President and Welfare Officer) also monitors implementation of the policy. We will want to look with USSU at where policy and responsibility rests under the new structures.

### **Action**

We clearly need to further review the issue of academic support in general (of which personal tutoring is part) so that we can ensure we put in place a system which can be delivered equitably and will meet students needs and which may encompass a range of provision to meet different needs (eg year tutors).

The expectation that students should be afforded the opportunity to meet and review progress with personal tutors is entirely reasonable and right.

There does need to be greater clarity in the information given to students about what the role of the personal tutor is and what the minimum expectation are. We will address this by including clearer information on Sussex Direct and in the main student handbook and in School handbooks which are issued at the beginning of the academic year.

We will look at how more specific targeted information on personal tutors can be provided to incoming students.

We accept that there does need to be fresh thinking and new policy in this area. We are getting Directors of Student Support and Directors of Undergraduate

Studies together to brainstorm and share best practice, and will bring back initial thoughts by the end of the Spring Term.

**Forums for future discussion**

We will want to discuss with USSU how the review of academic support (including personal tutoring) will take place, taking account of USSU concerns and feedback from the NSS.

Directors of Student Support are responsible for monitoring provision of PTs, and each School has a Student Support and Development Committee on which students are represented.

As noted above, the expectation that students should be afforded the opportunity to meet and review progress with personal tutors is entirely reasonable and right. If it is the case that students are seeking and being denied this opportunity this should be raised with the Head of Department or the Director of Student Support in the School and departments will be expected to remedy this.

## **University accommodation**

### **Background**

We recognise the significance and importance of providing an appropriate range of accommodation for our student population to match their needs, and looking forward to expected future demand. We also recognise that involving students and their representatives is a vital part of getting the strategy and approach right for Sussex. We would want to check and confirm with USSU that steps being taken as set out in this section do indeed achieve this.

The University's Housing Strategy was launched in 1989 and has been reviewed annually in consultation with the Students' Union. The partnership created by this process has successfully delivered around an extra 1,200 rooms either through acquisition or new build (eg Lewes Court). In addition, the housing strategy is informed by the results of the annual exit survey which is completed by, on average, 600 students.

The University Council, at its meeting in December 2005, with the support of the Students' Union, approved an ambitious five year housing development programme. The programme is based on a detailed demand analysis which indicated that the University would be unable to meet its future housing commitments without a significant residential development programme.

The minimum requirement indicates a shortfall of existing supply against predicted demand by 2010 of around 550. The proposed programme now being taken forward includes two schemes (Falmer Station Residences and the New Residences Building) providing 720 beds by 2007. These en-suite rooms will meet the anticipated type of demand for accommodation.

The University will also be advancing proposals for a further development at the north-end of campus and the demolition of East Slope and the building of new residences on this site.

Student representatives will be fully engaged in the delivery of the proposals and regular consultation meetings have already commenced. The University aims to be fully compliant with the new Code of Practice being introduced for student housing.

### **Action**

#### **Basic Services and Maintenance**

The recent annual exit survey confirms that 74.4% of residents reported a repair during their stay in accommodation. Of those reporting a repair 72.1% felt the

repair was dealt with adequately. However, this masks some specific problems this year with boilers and small items such as kettles which regularly get broken.

The performance standards for repairs and maintenance are set out on page 10 of 'Living with us' – a guide sent to all students with their tenancies. This booklet also contains details of the Residential Services Area repair reporting and complaints procedures.

We are reviewing our approach to maintenance and after consultation with the Students' Union and the Residential Advisers we will incorporate the details of the arrangements in the next edition of 'Living with us'.

In respect of the hot water supply in East Slope, there are problems with the age and design of the heating and hot water systems. For example, it is not possible in a small number of flats to separate the heating from the hot water. Therefore, when the heating goes off so does the hot water. Adjustments have therefore been made to the timing controls to provide constant hot water. It is important to make clear that there is no policy or savings-driven agenda to cut the hot water supply or other services to East Slope, which had been rumoured when this practical problem first arose.

### **Host Family Students**

The University houses approximately 3,000 students. At the beginning of this year it was able to meet its formal commitments to undergraduates and postgraduates who had accommodation guarantees. But some other students, not on the priority list, were temporarily housed in host families. Approximately 120 were placed using this scheme and all were offered University accommodation by week 5. In addition, some students decided to make their own arrangements using private sector housing.

There were issues arising from the operation of the scheme at the start of the 05/06 academic year. The number of student placed with host families was higher than anticipated and this did give rise to a series of problems and challenges.

The scheme has already been reviewed with the Students' Union and agreement reached on a series of improvements should it be necessary to use it again, particularly at the same level as last October. These include creating an email list so that students can contact each other and holding the meeting for host family students at the start of Freshers Week rather than on the Friday. Should we need to use the scheme again we will liaise closely with the Students' Union.

Intake targets for 2006 are being set with a view to minimising a repetition of these problems, but some use of the host family may be necessary at the start of the 2006 academic year. The new residences, due to be on stream for 2007

should bring the use of this scheme to an end.

## **Rents**

The Students' Union will be fully involved in the development of the residences programme as representatives of the tenants.

We fully recognise the need to provide a range of affordable housing. We have increased the proportion of en-suite rooms with new build because of demand from students and because we have less of this style of accommodation compared to other Universities. The retention of a choice and range of housing will remain part of the overall strategy, tailored to meet needs of all students.

## **Forums for future discussion**

Individual student concerns: set out in detail on how to raise complaints and problems (page 32) in the Housing Guide 'Living with us'.

Collective discussion: exit Survey undertaken in the Summer term each year and the summary results reviewed by the University and Students' Union.

Continuing informal and formal dialogue between the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers as representatives of the tenants and the Director of Student Services with the Residential Services Division.

The Trading Services Board (or its successor body) is responsible for the operation and monitoring of all trading services on campus.

### **Further clarification on accommodation**

In light of the management response above, USSU presented a number of comments (on Tuesday 7 February) on accommodation. The following Q&A respond in detail to those questions.

USSU Q1. When is the Housing Strategy reviewed?

USSU Q2. How is consultation to be meaningful?

A. Review of the housing strategy - The strategy is reviewed through regular consultation meetings with the Students' Union. There will also be termly meetings of the Trading Services Committee or its successor body with the annual update going to the Strategy and Resources Committee and Council.

*USSU Q3. 'The recent annual exit survey confirms that 74.4% of residents reported a repair during their stay in accommodation. Of those reporting a repair 72.1% felt the repair was dealt with adequately. However, this masks some specific problems this year with boilers and small items such as kettles which regularly get broken.'* - Where is the evidence that that is what it is masking? Does it mask problems such as two out of three showers are shared by thirteen students are broken in Norwich House?

A. The evidence of broken kettles and boilers is based on fact i.e. we know we have a problem with the boilers in Kings Road and a programme of replacement has already started, and broken kettles were specifically mentioned in the exit survey.

Regarding the showers in Norwich House – There has been a problem which should have been picked up earlier. The Residential Services Manager has initiated a review of procedures to tighten up fault reporting and response times.

The ratio of showers/bathrooms in Norwich House is 1:6

*USSU Q4. 'We are reviewing our approach to maintenance and after consultation with the Students' Union and the Residential Advisers we will incorporate the details of the arrangements in the next edition of 'Living with us' - What arrangements?*

A. Maintenance arrangements – These are still under review and new operational procedures will be put in place once finalised. We are more than happy to discuss these with the Students' Union.

*USSU Q5. 'In respect of the hot water supply in East Slope, there are problems with the age and design of the heating and hot water systems. It is important to make clear that there is no policy or savings-driven agenda to cut the hot water supply or other services to East Slope, which had been rumoured*

*when this practical problem first arose.*' - Upon speaking to the building manager of East Slope the reason given for lack of hot water was that students this year get up earlier than normal and use up all the hot water. Therefore, this does not change the fact that students still have to go without hot water. The student submission makes no mention that this issue is savings-driven but rather feeds into the feeling that new development plans are thrown in the face of valid issues at East Slope.

A. East Slope hot water – Following adjustments to the controls we have not received any adverse reports.

*USSU Q6. 'Approximately 120 were placed using this scheme and all were offered University accommodation by week 5. In addition, some students decided to make their own arrangements using private sector housing.'* - According to the list given to the USSU Welfare Officer on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 208 students were placed with Host Families. This comprised of late applicants, insurance students and clearing students. Many students felt compelled to make their own arrangements, as they felt so let down by their residential services at Sussex.

A. Only 120 opted to go into host family accommodation, others made their own temporary arrangements – this would include staying at home or with friends. We merely kept them on the list to ensure they received the priority for rooms when they became available.

Regarding USSU involvement – we suggest that the setting up of a joint project group should it be necessary to use the host family scheme in future. As part of this process the Union could arrange social events and shuttle services which they are better placed to provide. Overall we are happy to talk through the issues with USSU and we have done on a regular basis since the launch of the first Housing Strategy in 1989.

## **Equality and Diversity**

### **Background**

The University has developed a number of equality and diversity policies which can be found on the Sussex website. These will continue to be maintained and updated by Human Resources Division. This will be the responsibility of the Diversity Adviser who will be appointed replacing Liz Burchett.

A range of initiatives to support equality and diversity plans were developed by the equality and diversity team, including working closely with the Students Union.

Having established these groups, the University felt strongly that each part of the University needs to “own” equality and diversity issues themselves. Indeed this is a fundamental requirement and expectation of equality and diversity legislation and practice.

Where specific objectives and plans are developed, they will be subject review in terms of outcome at local or corporate level as appropriate.

Progress towards targets is monitored annually and is reported to Senate who discuss these matters. Student Support and Progress Committee discusses equalities issues regularly.

During the period of staffing change, equalities committees have been stood down temporarily. We will want to review our structures and consultative arrangements as we go forward.

Equalities and diversity is therefore rightly managed by the senior team and is the responsibility of the whole University not the sole responsibility of any one individual. However, the Vice-Chancellor has ultimate responsibility for the effective implementation of policy. In practice, the successful implementation comes about through action at all levels.

### **Action**

The University will be ensuring that we maintain a dedicated staffing resource to support our equality and diversity policy and practice. HR will be recruiting to replace Liz Burchett.

### **Forums for further discussion**

Student Support and Progress Committee and Senate provide general forums for students to discuss these issues with staff at the University. However, since equalities and diversity issues are part of all aspects of University life, it is

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appropriate to raise these matters in relation to their contexts, such as within School forums, or with central admin units overseeing matters like student and staff recruitment.

Equality and Diversity Committee reporting to Council will continue to operate as a key committee in the new structures.

## **Accessibility of USSU activities**

### **Background**

As the USSU submission acknowledges, there has been considerable recent liaison and work towards improvements on these fronts, and we would want to discuss further with USSU to ensure we understood some of the assumptions running through this section which we would question.

The section leads with the University's true statement about welcoming diversity, and seeks to juxtapose this with issues for particular groups of students in accessing non-academic activities and opportunities provided by USSU, around their studies. We do not think this is a wholly fair comparison.

The University actively seeks to create a diverse and cosmopolitan academic community. We would of course want to see all students also having equal access to non-academic activities and facilities, which are largely – and rightly - provided by the USSU.

We regret that the submission does not, in our view, fairly acknowledge how much active work the University has engaged in on these fronts, with USSU. PVC Mary Stuart's SLA group, which brought together USSU and senior University officers, has worked hard and successfully through 2004/5 and Autumn 2005 to help the USSU to rationalise its activities within an overall budget that was protected from cuts.

There has been considerable recent progress relating to teaching timetabling, not just to improve access to Wednesday activities, but also to clear Friday lunchtimes for students' religious observance, and prior to that the move to publishing timetables much earlier (largely to help students plan their outside commitments).

Our policy in this area, which is borne out by our recent work, is to listen to student feedback and take steps to reduce tension between teaching timetabling and extra-curricular activities and maximise student access to those activities. But there are real practical limits to what can be done on this front at a given point in time, without forcing teaching outside core hours, which would be clearly counterproductive from the viewpoint of diversity/equal opportunities. We won't make empty commitments to magical solutions in this area, but we will continue to work with USSU to improve arrangements.

As is made clear elsewhere in this document, the University has no intention of backing away from the plans and momentum established in recent years in the area of equal opportunities and diversity. Much of this momentum is already 'mainstreamed' and new staff resource is currently being recruited to ensure continued progress.

### **Action**

In 2005 we agreed with USSU a revised policy regarding timetabling and Wednesday afternoons, and also arrangements for Friday lunchtimes to better support the religious needs of some students. The Wednesday afternoon policy was published via the timetable page of Sussex Direct in October 2005 and all teaching staff have been sent an explanation and request for cooperation with both policies, as agreed with USSU.

We will continue to explore, with USSU, ways in which these timetabling arrangements and other academic-related arrangements can be made to integrate better with non-academic activities and opportunities, and we will implement any further changes promptly.

We will also take forward, in concert with USSU, issues relating to the amount of notice that students get of compulsory weekend academic activities like field trips, to find a good policy line.

In the meantime we will actively police the implementation of current policies in the way that teaching is timetabled; we will issue periodic reminders to staff, and we will take steps to resolve as quickly as possible any problematic situations brought to our attention by students/USSU.

See separate section on block grant.

We believe that there are higher priority issues across the University for funding than an activities participation audit. It would be hard to argue that Sussex should devote additional resource to an audit of USSU-led activities, which the USSU does not itself see as a priority for funding within its own budget. If USSU does think it sufficiently important they have set aside discretionary funds and could use them.

### **Forums for future discussion**

For general University policy: the new USSU-senior management forum.

Specific issues: continue direct liaison with service-providers – eg Registry for timetable issues.

## **Sport**

### **Background**

The current Sussexsport budget is £259,000, including the coaching budget of £32k. The budget allocation is specifically earmarked to ensure that Sussexsport can provide high quality sport facilities and services to the whole campus population. Students also pay £33 to USSU for membership of a sports club. It is estimated that 10% of the student population participates in the Students' Union Sport Programme.

Delivery of Sport is very much a partnership between Sussexsport and the Students' Union, in particular, the Activities Centre. Presently, there have been detailed discussions emanating from the SLA Group about the delivery of sport and activities and more than one model was considered. The present arrangements facilitate close collaboration over service provision and a Students' Union/University Joint Sports Development Group is one manifestation of this good working relationship; this group meets once a month.

In January 2005 the Students' Union established a Sport Review Group to set an objective framework for assessing and evaluating service delivery. Previously, there had been no review of the criteria for creating a new sports club and existing clubs were under resourced. Quality of delivery and safety issues existed and there was a lack of suitably trained staff with adequate expertise within some of the clubs. The USSU Group recommended that four clubs and one team be withdrawn from the programme. This included joint community/university run clubs, an arrangement which raised safety, oversight and financial issues.

### **Action**

#### **Hire charges**

The hire charges for the facilities are set at student rates, in line with casual student use, and reflect practice elsewhere. The imposition of these charges helps in formalising the allocation process which includes the safeguarding of core time for student club activities. (Where new clubs are added in-year – such as women's cricket – we have amended the allocation. But these need to be recognised sports clubs.) Time is also available for general bookings open to all campus users.

#### **Increase block grant**

The core budget for Sussexsport is £227,000. Two years' ago the University responded to representations from the Students' Union to provide a budget for coaching (currently £32,000). This is acknowledged as being a major

contributing factor in our improved BUSA rankings. Some financial assistance is also provided through, for example, the Community Social Fund.

**Forums for future discussion**

There needs to be continuous discussion with the Sport Development and Service Level Agreement Groups. These groups should consider extending areas of partnership and collaboration to maximise the potential for sport and recreation at Sussex and the role these activities play in enhancing the student experience.

## **Drama**

### **Background**

The School of Humanities introduced an element of practice-based drama into their new degree in 2003. This element (25% of the degree) is designed to assist the understanding of textual analysis and drama as an academic discipline not to train students for the theatre. The Students Union has successfully run a number of societies that put on productions through the year.

Discussions with the drama faculty revealed a need for more workshop space and a dedicated workshop space is now in operation in the EDB building.

There have been constructive discussions with the Gardner Arts Centre about allowing more access for performance and exhibition space for students on our degree programmes in drama and film & media, and access has significantly increased over the last two years.

Further discussions on reducing the cost for the Students Union societies to use the Gardner Arts Centre are ongoing.

During 2005 the students Union brought a proposal to the Space Planning Group to upgrade the Debating Chamber for productions and this was favourably received. The issue is one of cost at a time of constraint. Other possible venues on campus are being explored.

### **Action**

Any improvement of Mandela Hall will need to be part of a more general upgrading plan; this is already under active consideration and being costed.

Further discussions with the Gardner Arts Centre will be taken forward. The drama faculty should present any requests for further resources through their School Management Committee.

### **Forums for future discussion**

Discussions in relation to the upgrading of facilities of Falmer House should be progressed between the new main discussion forum between USSU and management.

Concerns from drama students have been listened to and further concerns should be raised through the School of Humanities.

## **Funding and Resources for Student Activities**

### **Background**

The Students' Union is a key part of the University's decision-making with representation on the Council and Senate and on almost all University and School committees and on many of the University's working groups.

There has been extensive discussion through bodies such as the Service Level Agreement Group chaired by PVC Mary Stuart and attended by all USSU sabbaticals as well as regular formal and informal meetings with senior managers. Periodic meetings with members of Council started last Summer.

The Students' Union has also been centrally engaged in key decisions which directly impact on the student experience, eg housing strategy.

Closer working with all University officers has been developed, for example the direct and regular collaboration between the current Director of Communications and successive USSU Communications Officers.

This year's block grant allocated from the University to USSU was £637,000 - an increase of almost 6% over the previous year's allocation of £603,000. This was one of the few allocations across the whole University not to be asked to scale back its spending plans to more manageable levels. This facilitated the retention of existing service levels.

The University has put significant management time and effort to work with the USSU to improve the management structure of the Union, the management of USSU businesses and the financial reporting systems. It is regrettable that this has not been acknowledged in the concerns raised here.

It is common across the higher education sector for union trading companies to provide funding for core activities and this needs to be reflected in the business plans and budgets of SUSUS. Indeed, the USSU – as a charitable organisation – would not be allowed legally to operate a trading company unless the profits were specifically allocated to the operation of the charity.

Closer collaboration with the University on trading matters could produce positive benefits and we look forward to discussing opportunities through the trading services group.

### **Action**

New proposals for formal committee decision-making arrangements for the University were set out in proposals to Senate and Council in December 2005.

Representation for students is being embedded in the new committees and representation on the Strategy and Resources Committee represents a significant strengthening compared to current arrangements. The detailed proposals for the committee structure are being developed this term and we look forward to discussing this with the USSU.

We want to review the operation of the SLA group discussions, and strengthen the formal and informal mechanisms for discussion between USSU representatives and senior University management.

We would in particular be keen to understand why many of the issues raised by this submission to Council were not previously been raised or discussed with senior management through these formal and informal routes.

We would be happy as part of that to agree clear expectations for involving students in both informal and formal consultation processes at Sussex.

The block grant for the Students Union will continue to be negotiated and discussed with the USSU in the usual ways, reflecting the resources available to both the University and the USSU through its trading company.

#### **Forums for future discussion**

Direct discussion with Registrar and working group on creation of new committee structures in the run up to proposals to Senate and Council.

Direct engagement with VC and Registrar to establish new formal and informal arrangements for discussion and consultation with USSU and Sussex management, including the arrangements for current forums such as the Service Level Agreement Group.

Trading Services Board (or successor body) for discussion on collaboration on trading services.

## **Social Spaces and Entertainments**

### **Background**

The University welcomes the Students' Union's intention to organise more social events, particularly those not focussed around alcohol. It is also acknowledged that the University has ambitious plans for the expansion of the resident student population at Falmer. Consequently, serious consideration has to be given to social and entertainment facilities to meet the demands and expectations of the student community. The improvements to Mandela Hall to make it a suitable location for events will be considered as part of a review of social space.

### **Action**

We propose to work with the USSU to review social and entertainment space and provision on campus and report to students and the campus community during this year.

### **Forum**

Informal group involving USSU and Student Services already established

Discussions of issues of this kind will take place through the Campus Facilities Working Group involving USSU

## **Food Provision**

### **Background**

Catering on campus is a shared responsibility and not just a University issue. Many of the cash food, beverage and alcohol services on campus are operated by the Students' Union and franchisees.

Consultations with the Students' Union have confirmed that day-time catering, particularly during term-time, is satisfactory but there could be more diversity and an improved range of healthier choices. Early evening services (from 4.00 p.m.) including the Falmer Bar, Institute Café, Falmer Sports Complex, Library Café, Grapevine (pasta service) and the Laines (curry night) appear to be meeting demand. However, after 9.00 p.m. only the Pit Stop is open and this closes at 11.00 p.m. There also needs to be more non-alcoholic social spaces in the evenings and at weekends.

In terms of the campaign the Students' Union has stressed the importance of better late night provision and more weekend catering. This should include delivery services since there is evidence this would be popular. Better supermarket and modern vending services also have a part to play with many students wishing to eat at home.

There are trading companies who would welcome the opportunity to provide catering services 8.00 am – 4.00 pm during term-time. However, even franchisees and small operators are concerned about the financial viability of late night services.

When the ownership of Falmer Bar transferred from the University to the Students' Union a few years' ago it was on the basis that this facility would be the hub of late night entertainment, including the provision of food. Unfortunately, the provision of food beyond 7.00 pm did not materialise.

The University is a year round enterprise but peak demand for catering services falls in term-time. Trade tends to tail off in the second half of the Summer term producing a 25-week peak-trading year. Several units, including Falmer Bar and the Park Village Social Centre close in vacations but the University continues to operate cash services for students and staff who are here throughout the year. The higher margins from conference business help the overall financial position but the continuing provision of "social and welfare" services has a negative impact on the account.

It should be noted that Catering department, as a single entity, no longer exists as a result of re-structuring. The presentation of last year's figures was designed to show, more accurately areas of loss/subsidy. To produce a direct comparison with the previous presentation of the accounts, significant income streams have

to be off-set against the deficit referred to. The failure to reach a break-even position arose primarily from a change of bar policy referred to later.

There is also price sensitivity on the campus and an expectation that campus products will be cheaper than outside. The majority of students live in the City which offers major attractions. Brighton also attracts campus students, particularly, for evening/late night entertainment. Food alone is not a sufficient draw to keep students on site and late night provision is a commercial risk for any operator.

Retail also plays a part since there is evidence of students wishing to provide for themselves. Social/dining space within the flats and houses is something that is a high priority in terms of design and a feature of all recent developments. This points to improved food retail.

We acknowledge that much of Bramber House, in particular, the food production areas, is out of date and in need of investment to facilitate more efficient and cost effective delivery of services. Plans coming forward for this building being developed by the Campus Facilities Working Group] will seek to address this issue.

The decision to make the Grapevine Bar non-smoking was right in order to offer choice and protect the health of staff and customers. However, it has produced a loss of trade, some of which has transferred to Students' Union outlets.

The excellent work undertaken by the Students' Union to review its own structures, including the recent appointment of a new Director and Commercial Services Manager, opens up channels for a serious dialogue, review and action planning to address weaknesses in service provision. This review should also assess the opportunities presented by the plans to have more students living on, or close to, the campus over the next five years.

The consultation process, which includes consideration of the proposals for the ground floor of Bramber House, has started and will continue, as a matter of priority, for the remainder of this term. Wider student consultation on service provision will be undertaken to inform future decisions.

### **Action**

We propose to take a radical review of student catering provision in collaboration with the Students' Union.

We continue to aim to provide services which better reflect the diversity within the community, and will review this as part of the review of food and beverage provision

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We will look to provide better evening and weekend services with less reliance on the bars

**Forums for future discussion**

Continuing informal and formal dialogue with the Students' Union through the Campus Facilities Working Group and the Trading Services Board (or its successor) to develop and improve food, beverage and retail services.

## **International student treatment**

### **Background**

Sussex has a relatively low proportion of overseas fee-paying students (and a relatively high proportion of EU students from outside the UK paying 'home' fees). It is a long-standing University strategy, supported by Council on which USSU is represented, to increase the number of overseas fee-paying students to closer to the average for similar HEIs, and it is important to the future financial health of the institution that we succeed in doing so.

In relation to the setting of overseas fees, we are required by law to set overseas fees at a rate that fully recovers our costs. This is incorporated in the formal conditions of funding by HEFCE, and has been a basic feature of the UK HE financial framework for over 20 years.

Our overseas fees are required to cover the full cost, per student, of everything that goes into the University existing and functioning, which is a great deal more than just the direct cost of the teaching and learning that the student is aware of receiving. (For example this would include campus maintenance, support services for students, administrative processes necessary for running the University such as admission, student records etc. All of which are necessary to operate the University, but which students will not always experience as a direct service.)

University costs have in fact risen on average by 6% a year in recent years – in large part due to increases in salary costs – which means that increases of 4% a year in fees broadly represent keeping prices constant in real terms.

In this context, and like every other UK HEI, Sussex must continue to set overseas fees in a straightforwardly businesslike way, factoring-in market intelligence, how our costs have risen, what competitors are doing, demand for niche programmes, etc. Our overseas fees are annually compared to those of other HEIs, and are currently very typical for the sector.

We do offer an excellent Chancellors International Scholarship scheme, which bears favourable comparison with other UK HEIs, and we are working hard to augment this with extra funds from donors.

But apart from the scholarship award-winners, it is important to be clear that we seek only to recruit overseas students who are in a position to pay full-cost fees, and we must not create a false expectation that students paying overseas fees can rely on the University to step in if their finances go wrong.

However sympathetically we feel towards students in this position (and we do), we work within clear constraints. The University cannot divert any significant

subsidy from funds provided by UK students and UK Government. This is the position of *all* UK HEIs, and there is no contradiction between this position and the internationalist aspect of our mission.

We are very aware of the competitive need to continue to improve our facilities, accommodation and support services for overseas students, as well as maintaining our high academic standards.

We invest a considerable amount already in dedicated support for overseas students in the International & Study Abroad Office (specialist visa support, social events and general trouble-shooting), and as the submission notes, we already have a hardship fund to help overseas students who find themselves in temporary difficulty. But the size of that fund, and the kinds of hardship that it can help with, are carefully limited because it cannot become a safety-net for general financial hardship, for reasons set out above. It does not seem sensible to further increase overseas fees to create such a fund.

We believe that our current marketing is honest; we do our best to avoid over-selling and inaccurate statements. But this is in the general context that we make no apology that our 'sales' literature has to do the job of selling! We also accept that Sussex like the rest of UK HE has some issues to address in relation to managing the general expectations of overseas students, given the relatively high level of UK costs and fees.

### **Action**

- The University will continue to set overseas fees according to its current businesslike practice. USSU will in future have representation on the committees (Strategy and Resources, and Council) which discuss and approve annual changes to fees. We are happy to discuss further with USSU to ensure they understand the issues outlined above, including the underlying legal and practical realities.
- The University fully accepts that it is in a competitive market and must re-invest overseas student fee income (like all income) to continue improving everything that we offer.
- We accept that overseas fee-paying students should cease to be charged separately for course packs, and will want to work through what this means in practice.
- We take on board the feedback that the existing hardship fund for overseas students is not well publicised enough, and we will work with USSU to improve this.

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- We are very committed to continuing to work with USSU on detailed improvements to all aspects of University arrangements that will benefit overseas students.

**Forums for future discussion**

For general University policy: new main USSU/central management forum.

Fees: Strategy and Resources Committee, and Council on which students are represented.

Scholarships/hardship funds: Scholarships, Bursaries & Awards Committee, on which students are represented.

Specific/detailed issues on student support: International & Study Abroad Office.

Summary of space audit data

School	Department	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level M	
		Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present
HUMS	AMERICAN STUDIES	20	17	12	9	15	11	7	6
	ART HISTORY	21	10	20	17	16	13	14	11
	ENGLISH	18	14	16	12	13	9	7	8
	HISTORY	23	19	24	22	23	15	7	8
	LINGUISTICS & ENGLISH LANGUAGE	18	15	17	15	18	13	7	7
	MEDIA STUDIES	20	13	20	13	17	14	9	9
	PHILOSOPHY	30	20	18	11	17	10	7	8
	SLI	10	9	11	10	-	-	15	4
	<b>Average for School</b>	18	13	17	13	16	12	8	8
IDS	IDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
	<b>Average for School</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
LIFESCI	BIOCHEMISTRY	53	23	24	19	24	23	7	0
	BIOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT	-	-	23	15	14	13	9	9
	CHEMISTRY	28	20	16	14	12	8	3	7
	PSYCHOLOGY	13	11	15	13	15	14	14	12
	<b>Average for School</b>	16	13	17	14	15	14	9	10
SCITECH	ENGINEERING	36	17	22	17	16	11	29	10
	INFORMATICS	16	13	23	13	15	10	11	15
	MATHEMATICS	28	22	19	8	23	17	7	10
	PHYSICS & ASTRONOMY	28	21	20	15	16	17	9	10
	<b>Average for School</b>	23	18	21	13	18	15	11	12
SI	CCE	12	12	-	-	-	-	9	9
	EDUCATION	29	24	12	12	-	-	-	-
	SLS	15	12	12	9	18	13	14	11
	SOCIAL WORK AND CARE	21	18	15	16	-	-	20	18
	<b>Average for School</b>	16	14	12	10	18	13	17	15

Management response: 10 February 2006

School	Department	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level M	
		Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present	Overall booked No. in Group	Actual Number Present
SOCCUL	ANTHROPOLOGY	16	14	14	9	18	16	16	15
	CDE	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	14
	CES	11	9	15	13	18	14	-	-
	CULTURAL STUDIES	15	12	23	14	17	14	-	-
	DEVELOPMENT STUDIES	15	11	17	10	16	17	-	-
	ECONOMICS	15	9	13	9	16	13	20	18
	GENDER STUDIES	16	16	15	11	-	-	12	8
	GEOGRAPHY	19	21	24	18	18	22	5	0
	IRP	16	13	14	11	15	11	13	11
	SEI	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	10
	SOCIAL THEORY	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	7
	SOCIOLOGY	15	12	16	11	15	9	20	16
	<b>Average for School</b>	15	12	15	11	16	14	15	14
SPRU	SPRU	36	27	16	7	15	10	26	18
<b>Average for University</b>		18	14	16	12	16	13	12	11

Notes:

1. Numbers in groups *include* tutors, who need to be deducted to get the size of the student group.
2. The absence of a value for a given Department/Level does not mean that no teaching has taken place. Because the space audit only covered GTS Seminar Space, Lectures or other teaching events which took place in non-seminar space were not included. Blank values could also mean that no activities took place in Seminar space in week 5 of the Autumn term when the audit was conducted, or can also be indicative of teaching groups and/or teaching sessions not having been created on CMS (Sussex Direct)