**VP Education Officer Report 2019 – Bee Morgan**

For ease, I’ve included my manifesto (italics) so it is clear exactly what I’ve been doing to tackle each point I ran on. Included at the end is a short highlight summary of additional things I’ve gotten up to so far. As always feel free to contact me with any questions.

**Consistency**

* *Continue to work with departments to* ***reduce bunched exams and assessments****, improving the wellbeing and performance of students overall.*

This is an ongoing battle for VP Education, but the University has also started a ‘programme level review’ this year - headed up by our new Academic Registrar who is a great pro-student lady - and this means I’ll be part of reviewing your courses as a whole for the first time. Previously this was only through individual modules which meant that the bigger picture of when deadlines clashed on courses was never picked up. I’m positive about what we’ve already achieved so far here and think this will really make a difference.

* *Lobby the university to* ***reduce the number of 6-7pm lectures*** *where possible - Over 5000 students had 6-7pms in Michaelmas term 2018. I will encourage the university to* ***implement live streaming****, and campaign for* ***all 6-7pms to be recorded*** *so students who can’t attend (e.g. due to sport/society/work commitments) aren’t unfairly disadvantaged.*

This is what I consider one of my **‘**TOP 5’ for the year so I’ve been pushing the hardest on this. Back last term I submitted my first paper to Education Committee about this but unfortunately any power to implement any immediate changes was removed. A highlight of that meeting was when a university staff member stated that some students and staff actually benefit from teaching beyond 6pm… I have attended the ‘Teaching Day Working Group’ which is a subcommittee of Education Committee and brought some hard hitting points up here alongside Grishma and George, and as a result we’ve successfully **REDUCED 6-7PMS FOR NEXT YEAR!** Recording is a long battle with very strong opposition in some areas but I’ll be presenting next term the Student Annual Education Review which collates all your feedback and this is a key priority students want. I’ve had good conversations so far and I’m hoping to run a myth-buster for staff too to combat the misconceptions over recording, using the good relationship I have with UCU to find a compromise. Live streaming was not exactly well received in psychology (oversubscribed courses meant they had to do this what a surprise) so I have consistently pushed for this to compliment not replace recording.
From a union point of view, I’ve gathered feedback from academic reps around 6-7pms as part of my Top 10 uni – Top 10 demands campaign and I’m using this a start point for presenting facts to Uni. I’m also passed a policy unanimously stating that as an SU we do not support this late teaching (a side effect of unsustainable student number growth) and will be boycotting open days until the uni meets our demands. As a Top 10 university, you deserve a top 10 student experience.

* ***Review group work marking*** *- Look for a fairer, consistent method of marking to* ***compensate students for their proportion of work****. Allow an equal and clear reporting system, so students and staff know what to do should you experience problems.*

This I consider another one of my **‘**TOP 5**’**. I brought this to reps this year so I’ve now got lots of research on what you like and don’t like which I will be presenting as good practise to the Associate Deans Advisory Group soon. This was also included in my Education Committee paper. I’m working with the head of Academic Quality, but I’ve had significant backlash when I tried to push for some form of compulsory peer review.

* *Continue and expand* ***work on closing the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) attainment gap*** *- With a specific* ***focus on black students****, work with the university to identify barriers and help students overcome these.*

This I’ve taken a step back from as this is something George was working with Chris on. However, the first step has been achieving **undergraduate contextual admissions** for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, which should particularly help BME communities. I’m also still pushing for greater equality overall in the meetings I sit in, such as for international and BTEC students, and through Athena Swan.

* *Conduct a* ***review of the Academic Tutor/Advisor system*** *-* ***Creating a set of fair, consistent requirements****, allowing students to know where they stand and what to expect. This means staff can be held accountable when this isn’t met.*

Academic Tutors are also a ‘TOP 5’ for me, and it was great to hear that the University has just started to review this. The head of Academic Quality has started with staff to identify inconsistencies (apparently now everyone has a tutor at least on paper!). I’ve spoken to reps this year about this too and will feed in when student consultation is needed.

* *Campaign with President for* ***consistency across departments in supervisor and resource provision for Postgraduate Research students*** *– Alongside campaigning,* ***raise awareness of the PGR Code of Practice****, so students know what they are entitled to and where to access support.*

We’ve got a new Doctorate Academy set up so this will be something we bring to the discussion here (starting in the next few months if we get a new principle of grad college). I’ve helped make sure the postgraduate research committee remains for this year, as this was originally only for one year. The current academic rep system wasn’t working for PGR students so we’ve set up more ‘Eat and Critique’ events as a tailored way for students to give feedback and help create a community. Trustee board have also confirmed to use reserves to hire a one-year full time post to tackle postgraduate student issues.

**Clarity**

* *Lobby the university to* ***avoid extreme fee splits and increases*** *- With publication of the governmental Post-18 Education Review nearing and leaks suggesting tuition fee changes up and down depending on each course, look for* ***clarity for students******particularly******FST, FHM, EU (post Brexit), and international students***

Within my first few days of office I was in a meeting about international fees. When the increases were challenged, it was clear these were going to happen anyway no matter what was said which was frustrating. The Education Review was eventually published but this was just at the end of Teresa May’s term. With little to no indication what the current government will do with this, it’s really not clear what is going to happen next (much like Brexit). What was an interesting point was the review suggested reducing fees to £7,500 for UK students. However, the report was very hazy as to where the money was going to come from to top universities back up to the £9250 they’re used to. Universities are now generally tightening the purse strings just in case this does happen and increasing international recruitment to fill up the gap. Watch this space for where Lancaster goes next…

* ***Challenge the university on hidden course costs*** *– Present the university with evidence of unfair spending by students (e.g. field trips).* ***Establish a clear, equal, university-wide budget baseline*** *for any essential course extras, with as many included within fees as possible.*

In the current climate around money and fees as mentioned previously, this has been difficult. If, I’m realistic, I doubt I’ll be able to get the university to commit to this this year. However, I’m trying to go down a slightly different path to reduce costs for students, pushing departments to move to online only submission, as your reps said printing is very expensive and unnecessary. With my lobbying **students have spent £100,000 less on printing** so far this year. Or, like some, I’m looking at you physics, maybe getting free printing for students might help…

* *Be a strong* ***voice for students impacted by new construction*** *- Make sure* ***students are the clear focus in new builds*** *(e.g. the Library extension). I will also continue to* ***push the university for an off-campus study space*** *that is* ***accessible and inclusive*** *for both students with* ***disabilities*** *and those who* ***struggle to make the journey to campus****.*

I sit on the Project Executive Committee for the library build with our Chief Executive. In a previous meeting they helpfully announced they were over budget and suddenly planned on buying cheaper furniture to save £80,000. I was really uncomfortable with this especially after the extensive consultation with students as to what we actually want last year. Post that meeting, this now won’t be compromised because this would be quite a reputational hit, I wasn’t afraid to publicly shame the uni if they were to go back on their promises to students. I’ve organised a project update for reps which happened in week 7 too – noisy periods should only be between 8am and 11am.

Conveniently the university has put a halt on the off campus space to focus on building a new 400 seater lecture theatre instead, but I’m still going to push this as a great provision for students considering how congested space already is on campus. If possible, I plan to book the new castle conference space out for a few days for summer exams (if the uni lets me) so you can use it to study.

* *Push for the* ***university to release an individual departmental breakdown of spending****. Currently the best we have is ‘Academic Departments’ as a whole - How can we hold the university accountable if we don’t know how our money is spent?*

At my next meeting with the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Engagement, I’ll bring this topic up to see what she thinks is possible. I’ll then be able to determine what I can publish for a student based review (point below). On a union side I’m making sure our finances are clear and user friendly.

* Publish an ‘**Alternative Spending Review’**, breaking down the complicated, jargon-heavy University report to just **give you the facts on where your money is spent**.

**Communication**

* ***Better communication and support for the first year Minor system and module choices*** *- Students don’t feel they understand Minor or module selections, wanting* ***advice on their degree and module flexibility*** *both before and during university, including how their options now might affect their studies down the line.*

As part of the programme level review mentioned earlier I’m bringing up the feasibility of some minor options. I’ve also been asking reps what their department does in regards to minors and to module choices which has been included as part of the review. Minor options are being slimmed down for next year so there should be no clashes anymore, and this should also help ease pressure on the timetable.

* *Push for departments to* ***update module descriptions and handbooks*** *- Information is often out of date and misleading, meaning students can’t make informed decisions.*

Using CMA (the consumer marketing authority), I can show the university where it is in breach of its legal obligations as it’s not providing what was advertised. I’ll be asking lead reps to send me their handbooks and highlight where modules are lacking. I plan to bring this to the Associate Dean’s Advisory group to tackle these inconsistencies before next year.

* ***Introduce post-exam feedback*** *- Currently module reviews are submitted too early to include views on exam papers, this new system will* ***allow students another way to voice their opinions****.*

A 6% drop in our National Student Survey results for assessment and feedback this year means this is a priority. This manifesto point had two strands, as part of the academic tutor review I want to make it a blanket policy that students can request their exam scripts back through their tutor to review (hence ongoing). It was brought up in one of my meetings in relation to exam script comments that “external examiners felt that comments given weren't enough for students. There were recommendations of 2 comments per page but as a student I wouldn't think that's enough.” By giving all students the chance to look at what’s been written we’ll then be able to work out where the inconsistencies are and work on improving these.
Secondly, there is a survey working group where end of module vs post assessment feedback options are being debated currently, I’m unsure when to expect an outcome from this group as the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education is now leaving. At an Education Committee meeting staff were expressing how “we're not reflecting feedback back to students, the basics are not happening across the uni” (and that in some cases it just wasn’t being listened to at all) so fingers crossed for some change here.

* ***Create an equal, university-wide feedback communication system*** *with Academic Reps - This* ***informs all students what changes they’ve benefitted from*** *in their courses and* ***allows for accountability*** *when change might not have happened.*

As there is a disconnect between departments, the union and reps, I’m planning on seeing what I can do through iLancaster and our website (currently being reviewed). Giving feedback a bigger platform should help here. I’ve also **secured funding for the first time** for academic reps, meaning they can now run campaigns and events with SU backing! Some of you have already come forward with ideas which has been great to see.

* *Encourage a* ***sense of belonging for Joint Major students*** *–* ***Push for a departmental staff contact*** *so students know where they stand and who they can go to for advice*

I’ve brought this up with the head of Academic Quality, but I’m not sure where this has got to. I’ll be checking where this is up to at our next meeting. I’ll also asking reps what helps them feel like they belong in a department so I can submit a set of recommendations to uni (this included a departmental study space for example).

* ***Facilitate discussions for Joint Major and Natural Sciences*** *students through a Sub-Academic Rep system - Giving these students a* ***platform to have their often over-looked voices heard***

I’m organising a meeting with the head of natural sciences soon to talk through how reps can better serve this unique degree set up. I also want to organise a focus group/drop in next term where I’ll be asking joint major students what they currently do and what they think would work best and then implement the ideas.

**What else I’ve been getting up to:**

* Top 10 Uni – Top Demands Campaign – I launched my big campaign this term which covers the top things students should be getting from their degree. As a top 10 uni, you should be having a top 10 student experience (sitting on lecture theatre floors is not acceptable). A big part of this had been pushing the uni on unsustainable student number growth which has had wide ranging impacts as you know. You should also see posters in your departments which I handed out to Lead Reps and posters on screens around campus. Please fill in the survey which will help me gather data on the issues to present to uni!
* Open Day Boycott – I unanimously passed a policy through the SU Executive Committee which meant the student union will now boycott all future open days and applicant visit days. The principle question is: How as a student union can we knowingly continue to put time and effort into adding to the current overcrowding problem? This is one of the most political things the union has done in years and I am really proud to be spearheading this, it’s also the topic you chose for our NUS conference motion.
* Academic Reps –I’ve reformed the rep academy so that students can get credit for work they do in departments for the first time. I’ve also re-hauled Lead Reps so that the job is clearer and more streamlined. We had just shy of 300 students attend training last term. I’ve also created new rep skill sessions so you can better understand the uni and wider context of UK higher education.
* Industrial Action – after students voted to support the industrial action at the AGM, I’ve done my best to support staff and affected students. For the first time we now have a good relationship with UCU, I’ve spoken at the picket and at a Teach Out on Student Number Growth. The university failed to budge on being able to assess slides uploaded onto moodle but fingers crossed UCU staff will upload comments with any slides to let you know whether they could be, to ease your confusion. I’ve also fully supported any student complaints made (shout out to LEC here) and if you need any help our advice team runs strike drop ins every strike day 2:30-4pm for anyone who needs it.
* Exceptional Circumstances – alongside the advice team and reps we’ve provided a student perspective to the new exceptional circumstances form, I’m waiting to see the final draft and any changes that have been made.
* Plagiarism – I’m part of the working group for this and I’ve already brought some really great student perspective after speaking with our advice team and students. This will mean better help for you when you’ve struggled with referencing and a fairer disciplinary process. Plus we’re considering for the first time how you might be affected in group work if another person plagiarises. This will be in place for next year.
* Academic Registrar – With George we were on the interview panel for a new position in the uni which we are very happy with the new appointment for!
* Integrated Masters – The university is looking to bring fourth year integrated masters students onto the same level as one year taught masters and provide them equal opportunities. They looked into how possible this is as I challenged them on their current inconsistencies and how that would open to even more major criticism. Unfortunately they seemed unhappy with how feasible this was with specific department spaces (eg labs) but I’m fighting for equal access in other ways (fingers crossed there will be better library access)
* iLancaster/Student Portal/LU Voice – I’m on the project board for this and I’ve been consistently pushing for a student focus as it’s tended to drift to staff. Hopefully we should have some decent streamlining of the three platforms this year, based on the priorities flagged by reps.
* Library Vision – I’ve been working with the library to make sure that the future plans are student focused. We’ll be running a big consultation event together in third term where you can let us know what is important to you and directly feed into the new strategy. We’ve also been working on space, value for money and resource tracking so watch this space for announcements!
* University Council – as part of this I’ve been to the new UA92 opening with George. We’ve also pushed the university on the decision to push a significant number of first year students off campus, the gender pay gap, being pro-active on the NSS results, and how the university can’t keep playing catch up with space for increasing student numbers.
* Societies – in the absence of a VP Activities in first term I picked up the responsibility for societies. I helped allocate funding and affiliated several new groups which include everything from Guide Dogs, to the Red Cross to Thai Society. I also made the affiliation process more transparent and accountable, referring the decisions for contentious societies and those with external affiliations up to the fully elected Executive Committee for the first time.
* Oh and we Saved The Sugarhouse

Here’s to a good rest of the year ahead,

Bee Morgan

VP Education

su.vp.education@lancaster.ac.uk