

## Notes of the Course Rep Forum – Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2017

**12:45-14:00 (EEG087)**

### Topic: Student Services and Money Advice

#### Attendance

**Chair:** Euan Morrison (EM, VP Education)

**Panel:** Ross Renton (RR, Pro Vice Chancellor), Susan Richardson (SR, Money Advice Service Manager), Caryn Thorogood (CT, Student Services)

**Also present:** 76 Course Reps, Sarah Greer (SG, Deputy Vice Chancellor), Tim Hewes-Belton (THB, Student Engagement Manager), Jodie Stilgoe (JS, minute-taker)

#### Minutes

<b>1. Welcome and introductions</b>	<p>EM welcomed everyone to the first Course Rep Forum of the academic year. He explained that this forum would focus on Student Services and Money Advice. EM then introduced the panel and staff members.</p> <p>RR explained that Course Rep Forums provide students with the opportunity to voice their opinions and feedback student queries from their course. Information given at these Forums help to enhance student experience and achieve effective academic representation.</p>
<b>2. Academic Representation Update</b>	<p>EM used a PowerPoint to update the audience on any changes that have been made to the academic representation system over the Summer months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the immediate changes was the name change from StAR to Course Rep</li> <li>• As part of the reviewing process, a working group was set up. The working group ensures that there is maximum feedback from students, adhering to a reflective and representative system</li> <li>• Instead of holding four forums like previous years, the Students' Union will be holding three forums and one conference.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Rep Conference Overview</b>	<p>EM explained that the Course Rep conference would be a day event and involve skill based workshops and talks from keynote speakers.</p> <p><i>When students entered the lecture theatre, they were given a form to write down any suggestions (for talks, workshops etc.) for the conference. Reps filled in these forms throughout the Forum and posted their ideas into a post-box upon leaving.</i></p>

4.	<p><b>Presentation on Student Services (CT)</b></p> <p>CT explained that the Student Services staff introduced themselves to new students during Welcome Week. They promoted the service itself and handed out flyers, leaflets and freebies.</p> <p>She went on to explain about <b>firstpoint</b> which is based at St John's Campus. <b>firstpoint</b> is a place where students can seek help and advice about a range of different problems, such as homesickness, money issues, or seeking support with bank accounts. All students are welcome to make an appointment to speak to a staff member.</p> <p>Student Services also offers the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Careers Service where students can seek advice about writing a CV or a job application, or if they have general employability queries.</li> <li>• Spaces for students to use for prayer, reflection or mindfulness sessions. Student Services also provide students with a group called 'Connect'. 'Connect' is a safe space for students to socialise and meet friends in a quieter environment with staff support if requested.</li> <li>• A learning difficulties and dyslexia service. This service offers students to undertake a diagnosis if they are experiencing any challenges.</li> <li>• Unitots is a Nursery on site and used by staff, students and community users.</li> </ul> <p>Recently there has been funding for a 'Bystander Initiative'. The initiative aim is to avoid and prevent harassment of any kind. It gives students and staff the knowledge and training so that they know how to safely step in and stop a potential situation arising. This year, training for this initiative is being piloted to targeted cohorts e.g. psychology students.</p> <p><b>Presentation on Money and Advice (SR)</b></p> <p>SR introduced her role as Money Advice Service Manager. She explained that students could make an appointment at <b>firstpoint</b> via phoning or emailing.</p> <p>The Money and Advice service covers a range of different issues such as advising students on budgeting, income, welfare benefits, educational trust funds or charities. The service also identifies common issues students (such as loan sharks) and use guest-speakers or campaigns to help students become aware of issues.</p> <p>SR explained about the Access to Learning fund, and that it helps to solve issues from extra commuting costs to pre-existing financial commitments for mature students and parents in particular. The Access to Learning fund is</p>

	<p>available to students throughout the academic year. Students can apply online or they can pick up a copy at <b>firstpoint</b>.</p> <p>SR then explained the 'Repayment System' concerning student loans. She clarified that previous study would affect payment eligibility.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Questions from Reps about the Student Services</b></p> <p><u>Q1. Last year, students were on a long waiting list if they wanted to speak to a counsellor in the mental health service. Is the waiting system under reform, and can we expect any improvements?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CT explained that the service arranges to see students depending on their needs. She recognised that it is not always easy to see students straight away but if there is a need to see a particular student quickly (in high risk situations) then that student will always be able to see someone on the same day</li> <li>• CT mentioned that the service holds workshops for students who might prefer to talk in groups. The service also provides a 'Fancy a Cuppa' initiative where students are able to come along to talk in a relaxed environment.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q2. What is the criteria for being eligible to access grants or bursaries?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SR explained that the service provides students with a leaflet called 'How much does it cost to go to University'. This leaflet contains criteria, guidance as well as a list of FAQs. In addition to the leaflet, guidance is also provided on the Student Services website.</li> <li>• RR also explained that within the 'My Day' app, there is a <b>firstpoint</b> leading to relevant guidance and criteria.</li> <li>• CT pointed out that it is always worth making an appointment with the student service advisors to check about eligibility.</li> </ul> <p><u>Q3. Do students need to make an appointment or does the service also provide drop-in-sessions?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students should make an appointment at <b>firstpoint</b> (SR)</li> </ul> <p><u>Q4. How long does it take, after filling out an application, to be able to utilise the Access to learning fund?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four weeks or less (SR)</li> </ul> <p><u>Q5. Will there be a review of the Unitots Service with regards to its opening hours? It could be more accessible for students and staff members.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CT explains that the service has to be viable. Staff and students work around timetables and the Nursery manager schedules as many people in as possible. Feedback from staff and students will always be acted upon if the request or query is feasible.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>General Questions for the Panel</b></p>

Q1. Parking for students is very difficult due to limited space. How are you going to overcome this issue?

- RR explained that the University are currently implementing alternative schemes such as the successful and popular student bus service, and encouraging students and staff to either walk, cycle (on bikes or e-bikes) or utilise public transport. At University open days and events, the University explain to prospective students that you do not need a car when you come to Worcester.
- The University will be introducing the ANPR (automated number plate recognition) scheme to limit the time that students spend in particular parking spaces. As well as this, the Moors car park (City Centre) and the car park at Jenny Lind have been cut down to a 4 hour maximum stay.

Q2. Does the University have a food bank?

- There is a food bank based in Hines Building (SG)

**Action 01:** University to liaise with the Students' Union and Marketing and Communications to advertise the food bank

Q3. (Student from Psychology) Is there a way to condense timetables?

- The next Forum we have in December will be focussing on timetabling and module selection (EM).
- RR explained that the expectation of full time student is that they are in University full time for 5 days a week. This does not depend on fixed timetables because students can also utilise the library or arrange to work with fellow students during their free slots.
- The University can review timetabling next year to find the best possible timetable for students. For example, the University could work with Psychology to implement different types of sessions e.g. revision classes.

Q4. I cannot attend a Course Rep training session. Is it important that we attend?

- EM explained that the Students' Union are going to be running generic training sessions (non-institute specific) for students who cannot attend the Institute-specific sessions. The time and location of these generic training sessions will be confirmed and circulated in due course.
- The Students' Union also offer online training (an interactive work booklet) on their website for students who cannot attend training sessions.

Q5. A Creative Writing student raised the issue that her course does not have a Course Leader at the moment

- In the absence of a Course Leader, students can see their Deputy. SG will feed this information back to the University

Q6. A student raises the issue of delays in receiving their Scholarship

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RR explained that some students did not update their financial details on the form which is why some students are experiencing delays</li> </ul> <p><u>Q7. A student from the Institute of Education raised the issue of having no tables in one of the Edward Elgar seminar rooms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The University is aware of the problem and a short term solution will be executed as soon as possible (SG)</li> </ul> <p><u>Q8. A query was made about prices in the REACH system</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The REACH system piloted last year and was not exclusive to all students e.g. nursing students. In the new academic year, students are now able to access REACH. MA students do not have access.</li> </ul> <p><b>Action 02:</b> EM to liaise with Val Yates to send all relevant documents to students about REACH</p>
	<p><b>A.O.B</b></p> <p><b><u>Feedback System</u></b></p> <p>RR provided students with an overview of how the feedback system works. Course Reps should not always wait for Forums to feedback student concerns, particularly as though some issues are easily resolved.</p> <p>SG explained that students should feedback a student issue in the following order:        Feedback to the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher of a class</li> <li>2. Course Leader</li> <li>3. Head of Centre or Department</li> <li>4. Head of Institute</li> </ol> <p>EM added that Course Reps also have Institute Reps and Academic Representative Coordinators who can help point Course Reps in the right direction.</p> <p>EM showed students the Worcester Students Union website and pointed out where students can fill in their Course Rep journals and where they can access key contacts. Journals are important for logging volunteering hours and they help the Students' Union identify any trends and issues.</p>

EM gave an overview of upcoming course rep training and forum dates. Students were then reminded about the Conference request forms given to them at the start of the Forum, and were asked to put these forms into the letterbox upon leaving.

**ACTION 01:**

University to liaise with the Students' Union, Marketing and Communications to advertise the food bank

**ACTION 02:**

EM to liaise with Val Yates to send all relevant documents to students about REACH

**-Forum adjourned 14:00-**