

High-Level Panel Debate: Minutes

The Hangar (11:00-12:00) Tuesday 6th February 2018

Attendance

Chair and Host: Euan Morrison (Vice President Education)

Panel: Ross Renton (Pro Vice Chancellor Students), Sarah Greer (Deputy Vice Chancellor)

Also in attendance: Jade Haley (President), Tim Hewes-Belton (Student Engagement Manager), Alannah Williams (Marketing and Communications Assistant), Jodie Stilgoe (Student Voice Assistant), and 70 Course Reps

Minutes

Welcome

EM welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the inaugural Course Rep Conference. EM introduced the panel (RR and SG) and explained the two overarching topics of this year's high-level panel debate:

- What should the future of Higher Education (HE) look like?
- What should the future of Worcester University look like?

Introductions: Sarah Greer and Ross Renton

SG began by providing students with an overview of the University of Worcester's five-year plan. SG explained that she is particularly interested in focusing on the following areas: employability, increased community involvement as part of modules, and introducing new subject areas.

RR widened the conversation to focus on national HE issues such as the freedom of speech debate. RR explained that the University of Worcester is committed to promoting and protecting the right to freedom of speech. Another topical HE issue is the fees debate. RR encouraged students to become engaged in this conversation so that the University can represent student opinions.

EM thanked the panel for their speeches and opened the floor to questions.

Students were able to submit questions for the panel debate on Twitter, using the hashtag #YourVoice2018, they could also fill out question slips in advance and throughout the debate, and they were able to ask questions directly.

Question and Answer Session

Q: What effect will the change of tuition fees have on Universities?

A: RR explained that when he first came into the HE sector, the majority of funding came from the Government. This has since changed and Institutions now have to source their funding from elsewhere. RR recognised that high fees and debt is an issue for students but he also recognised that Institutions must receive funding. He explained that there should be a conversation about where funding comes from, where that funding goes to, and whether it is possible for Institutions to source alternative methods of funding. Students should be a key part of this discussion. SG added that Worcester University campaigned against higher fees. She explained that the University would always try to voice the opinions of their students.

Q: With the pressures put upon Universities to be a business with a product to sell (education), how does the University of Worcester plan to still give access to learning for students who come from minorities or deprived areas?

A: SG explained that the University's key focus would always be on its students and the quality of their education. RR explained that Worcester University is for the public good, not for profit. The University has a £350k hardship fund (access to learning fund) and is prepared to spend every penny of it. The University is committed to ensuring that people from all backgrounds have access to Higher Education.

Q: With regards to the future of Worcester University, how does it aim to stand out, compared to other Universities?

A: SG highlighted Worcester's outstanding qualities such as its "friendly" atmosphere, and offering "niche" courses that other Universities do not offer. The University needs to continue to improve these unique qualities. RR explained that one of his main goals is to ensure that Worcester alumni remain engaged with the University's community after they graduate.

SG asked the audience the same question: what do they think makes Worcester stand out from other Universities? Answers included the following:

- Partner colleges enable students to have a large amount of flexibility. This flexibility helps students to balance part time work and family duties with their studies
- The support the University offers for dyslexia students is highly rated by students

Q: How can Worcester University improve the timetabling issues?

A: SG explained that the University is aware of timetabling issues and they are currently thinking about developing new buildings in the future. It might be that the University will introduce a blend of online learning and face-to-face learning to increase flexibility. However, online learning is not always successful and so it will be something the University will have to investigate further.

Q: Would the introduction of placement be a viable option for more courses to allow all students to have the opportunity to gain first-hand experiences?

A: RR explained that this is something the University is definitely looking to develop. In particular, the University would like to see some growth in placements in the Institute of Humanities and in the Institute of the Arts. He explained that the University currently holds careers fairs and work with national and international employers as well as the Chamber of Commerce.

SG added that students could also start to develop 'employability' skills in the classroom; for example, courses could start to develop problem-based learning with subject issues having more of a focus in the classroom.

Q: There should be emphasis on subject-specific placements. For example, a creative writing student should be able to go on placements in the editing and publishing sector.

A: SG explained that the University is aware of this particular challenge and this feedback will be taken on board.

Q: Should there be a minimum compulsory amount of teaching time for all courses at all Universities?

A: SG explained that every course in every Institute is different and has different requirements. Whilst there should be a reasonable amount of contact time, the University should also be encouraging and supporting students with their independent learning. The University currently monitors the contact hours of every course in order to ensure that every student is receiving an appropriate amount of face-to-face teaching. RR made a final note that quality is more important than quantity.

Q: How is the University planning to develop its Postgraduate opportunities? For example, will they be introducing more courses?

A: SG explained that the University is looking to develop more postgraduate programmes that relate to its undergraduate offer and enable to further the career aspirations of current undergraduate students. She requested that if students have suggestions for any new

postgraduate courses, please could they inform the University. SG also explained the time it takes to set up a new course.

Q: How can HE be accessible to everyone? How is the University of Worcester addressing the Black Attainment gap?

A: RR explained that those who have the capability to succeed in Higher Education should be able to access University. Worcester University is committed to ensuring that the Black Attainment gap is being targeted. Having said this, it is a national issue and every Institution needs to be addressing this.

Closing

EM thanked RR and SG for attending the high-level panel debate.

The debate ended at 12:00.