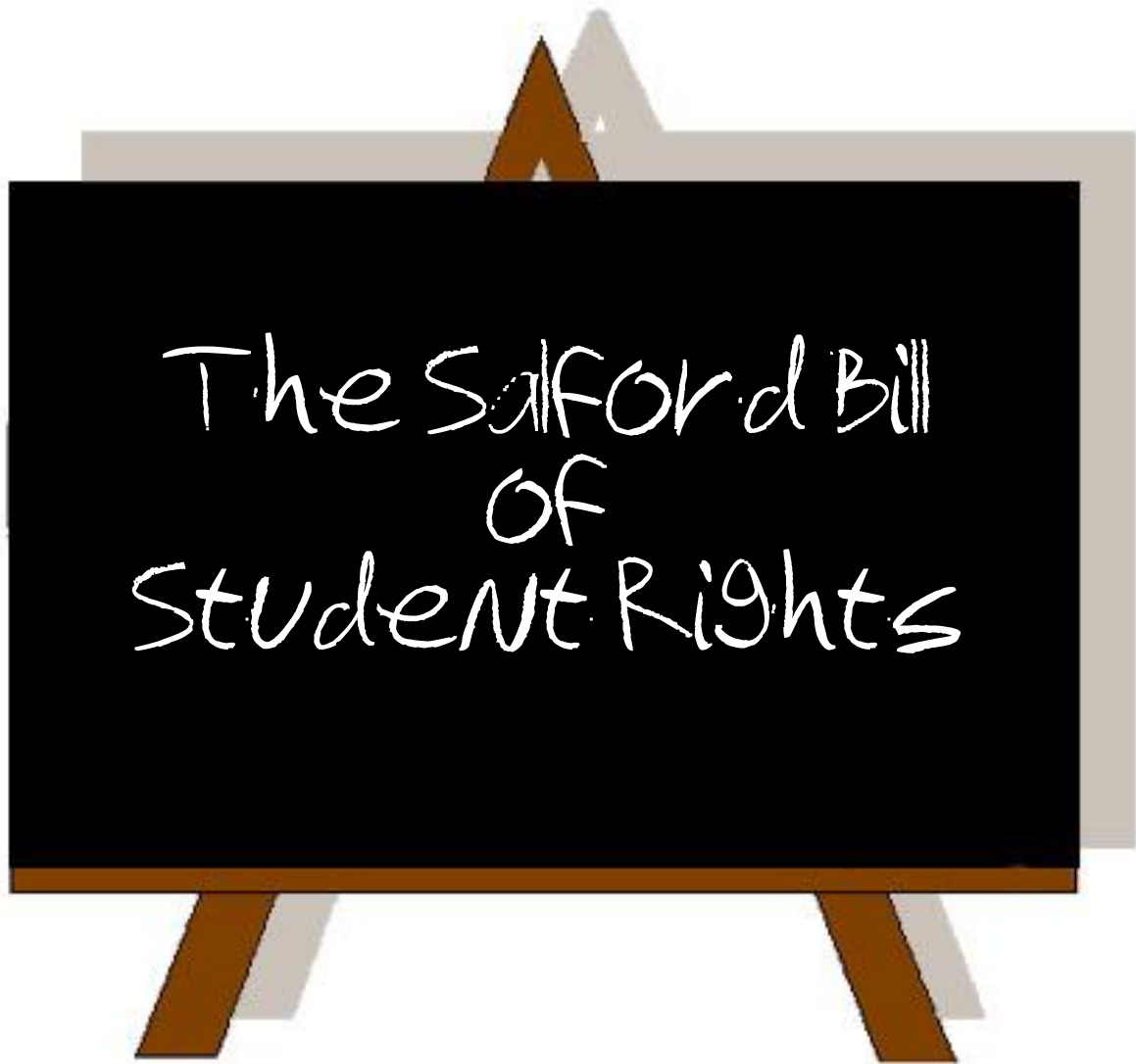
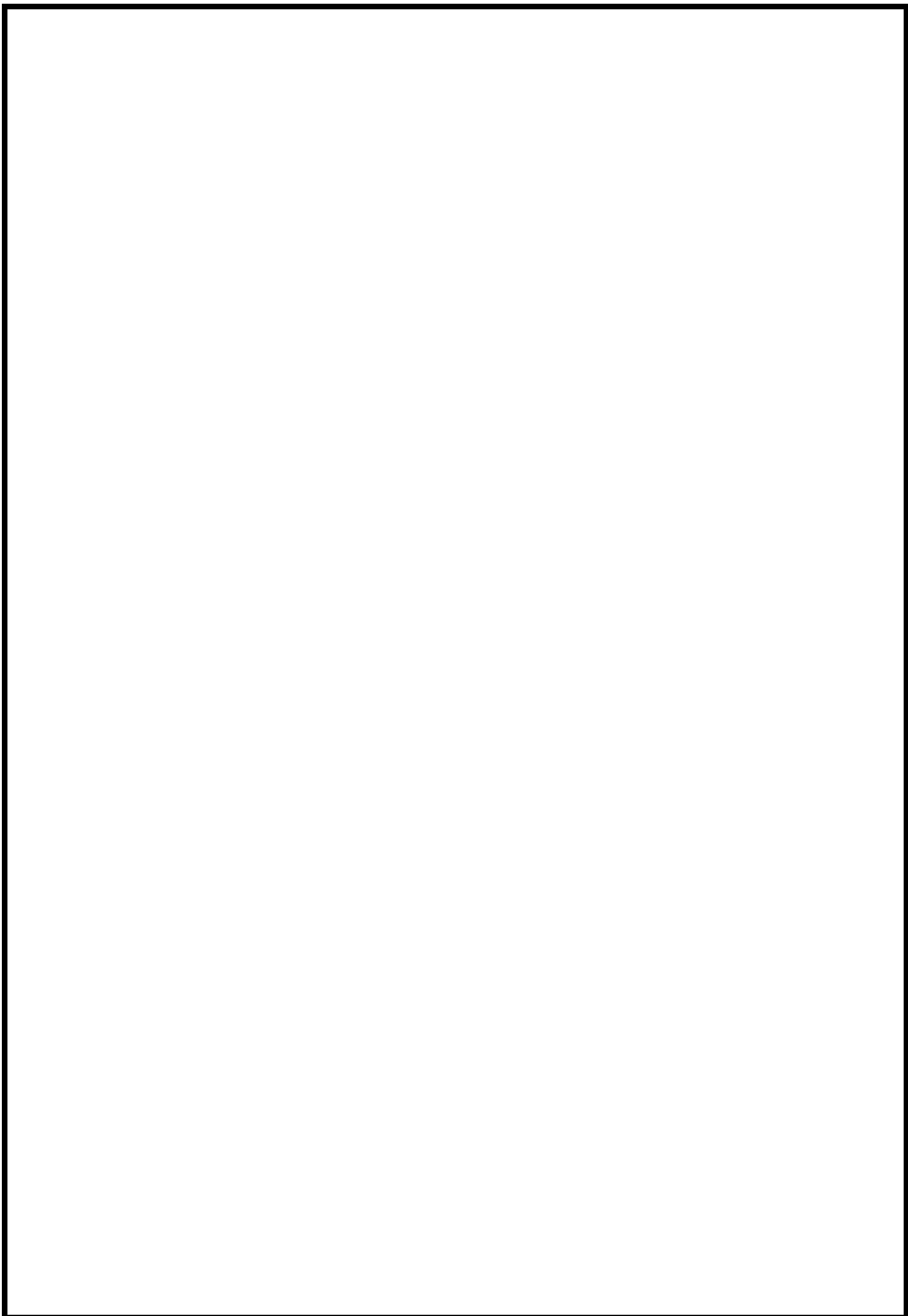


# UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD STUDENTS' UNION





# The Salford Bill of Student Rights

## Introduction

The Students' Union believes that every student at Salford should be provided with a set of seven basic rights while studying at the University.

This document outlines those rights. Each section of this document is accompanied by a series of recommendations which will be necessary in order for the University of Salford to meet the proposed rights. It is our aim that the University not only accept and endorse these rights, but that they will take active steps to meet the recommendations.

The seven rights have been drawn up following comprehensive research and consultation with students over the past twelve months. Much of our information has come from the National Student Survey (NSS) results from the last academic year, looking at both the percentage results and the open comments to outline the areas for improvement. We have also made use of the University's own survey, the Salford Experience Survey (SES). As well as survey data, we have used feedback gathered by going out as a team talking to students and from key Students' Union services to inform the details of this document; namely the Students' Union Advice Centre, and the student rep system.

It should be noted that the issues raised in this document affect students in different schools to varying degrees, and we recognise that while the focus here is necessarily on the inconsistencies, weaknesses and problems that need addressing, there are examples of good practice across the institution.

Below are the rights and proposed recommendations to be considered by the University.

Issue	Right
Hidden Course Costs	The right to know the <b>full costs</b> of a course before application
Assessment and Feedback	The right to quality, constructive <b>feedback</b> on all assessments within three weeks
Course Based Careers Advice	The right to relevant, high quality <b>careers advice</b>
Representation	The right to effective, independent <b>representation</b> at course, school and college level
Learning Resources	The right to appropriate, high quality <b>learning resources</b>
Academic Practice	The right to advice and guidance on <b>good academic practice</b>
Timetabling	The right to well managed and <b>organised timetables</b>

## Hidden Course Costs

### Right One: The right to know the full costs of a course before application

While the cost of tuition is widely publicised, extra compulsory course costs are often 'hidden' from prospective students and not mentioned in recruitment material. The impending fee rise to at least £6,000 will make it more important than ever for students to know how much in total their course will cost them by the time they complete it.

Hidden costs can include materials for art, design and media courses or field trips and fuel costs for placements. On a basic level, printing costs should also be included as these can often run into high sums when lecture notes, presentations and essays are needed in hard copy. Currently, some students have to choose; either they pay the extra cost for materials, trips and printing etc meaning that they may not be able to afford to live comfortably or they don't pay the extra costs and are heavily disadvantaged in terms of their academic achievement.

While it is not realistic to expect all extra course costs to be eradicated, students should be made fully aware that these extra costs exist and estimated expenditure should be given. We believe students have the right to this information before they come to University so they are aware of it from the beginning and can plan and budget for any extra costs.

#### Salford students said:

"The cost of materials isn't advertised in prospectus"

"In one or two modules the course material was not well prepared and printing off was time consuming and costly"

"Very little hand out is given. Cost of photocopying is much cost consuming" (sic)

**NSS responses 2010**

#### Case study: MA Product Design

Due to the nature of the courses in the school of Art and Design most students are required to pay extra costs for materials, field trips and art shows. A typical student in this school studying MA Product Design would be expected to pay **£1235** a year on top of their tuition fees.

\*It should be noted that the School of Art and Design are now publishing information on extra course costs for current students on Blackboard.

## Recommendations

1. The University should publish an outline of all extra costs that students will incur during their period of study. This document should be made available in the student handbook, via Blackboard and in recruitment material including the prospectus, both online and in hard copy.
2. The University should provide a hardship fund specifically for those in need of help with course costs to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to excel on their course regardless of financial situation.

## Feedback and Assessment

### Right Two: The right to quality, constructive feedback within three weeks

As a key element in the learning process, constructive feedback allows students to reflect on their assessed work, enhance their understanding of a subject area, and ultimately develop the skills needed to improve performance. Appropriate feedback is necessary following any assessed work, not just written exams and essays.

The 2010 NSS results highlight 'Assessment and Feedback' as the worst performing area for the University in terms of student satisfaction.

Across the institution, only 64% stated that they were satisfied with the feedback and assessment they received, and although there appears to be pockets of good practice in schools, there is also significant inconsistency. For example, while the statement 'Feedback on my work has been prompt' was endorsed by 87% of Nursing students, only 32% of MMP students, and 39% of ELS students agreed.

The inconsistencies between schools found in the NSS results were reinforced in the University's own survey<sup>1</sup> which also reported disparity. Agreement with the statement 'Feedback on my work has been prompt' ranges from highs of 78% and 75% (in Law, and Nursing and Midwifery respectively) to lows of 37% and 29% (in Business, and Built Environment respectively). This degree of dissatisfaction and the inconsistency in practice across the institution is not good enough.

#### Salford students said:

"Feedback on work is not given promptly enough. Work handed in is not given back quickly and sometimes not at all.

Feedback isn't given soon enough after hand in and isn't always detailed and constructive.

Hardly any help or feedback. Have no idea what is needed to get marked well.

Feedback on assessments, we don't get any all we get back is a mark.

**NSS responses 2010**

#### Case Study: Feedback

I submitted a key assignment in mid November and while I appreciate that the Christmas break interrupts a lecturer's time, it would have been useful to have the mark and feedback before term finished, so I could use it for revision. On average, my work takes between 6-8 weeks to be returned marked, and while the feedback is generally detailed and useful, I am surprised to hear that there is a three week University policy.

**Third Year Law student**

### Recommendations

1. Students receive personalised feedback within three weeks of the submission of any assessment.
2. Feedback must be constructive, of a high quality, and where appropriate include annotated scripts.
3. The University should standardise feedback methods across the institution, so that all students can expect the same level and quality of feedback, regardless of course of study.

<sup>1</sup> 'Student Experience Survey' 2010, University of Salford

## Course Based Careers Advice

### Right Three: The right to relevant, high quality careers advice

A key motivator for many students is the opportunity to improve their employability and to give themselves the best chance to pursue their dream career, or develop skills, knowledge and character capable of determining their future.

The University of Salford makes graduate employability a priority, maintaining good links with industry and offering many students the opportunity to take up work placements. Together with a quality University careers service, this is something to be applauded.

According to the 2010 NSS results, levels of student satisfaction with careers advice varies considerably across the institution. While the overall result of 71% satisfaction shows a welcome increase from the previous years' result, and fares well in comparison with other institutions, the disparity between results at school level is significant. In response to the statement '*Good advice is available for making career choices*', the percentage of students agreeing falls to 58% in Art and Design, 53% in Social Work, Psychology and Public Health and as low as 45% in Music, Media and Performance. Clearly, there are areas where significant improvement is needed.

Due to the huge variety in the University's portfolio of courses, careers advice must cater for significantly different expectations. All students should have the same opportunity for quality careers advice that is tailored for their particular field of study, or industry they wish to work in. It is notable that the schools where students are least satisfied with careers advice are those which require specialist advice for non-traditional career paths i.e. careers in art, music and performance.

#### Salford students said:

"No help in future careers or further studies".

"Students are not given clear info on what to do after finishing uni, uni is supposed to be a gateway into careers, but many people finish uni, and then are thrown into the real world with no direction, contacts or clear vision".

"Lack of relevant careers advice".

NSS responses 2010

#### Case Study: Careers Advice

When going into a profession as competitive as acting it is really important to have good careers advice to give you a fighting chance, but we have not been offered any. I have had to take the initiative and email someone external to find out how to write an acting CV. For most of my time at Uni, I did not know there was a careers service, and there has certainly been no mention of advice for performing arts auditions or CV writing for specialist career paths.

Third Year Performing Arts student

### Recommendations

1. Every course has an element of careers advice enshrined in the curriculum that gives students the opportunity to learn more about potential areas of employment related to each course and to develop the skills and knowledge required to successfully enter a career in their chosen field.
2. All teaching staff undertake a responsibility to promote employability skills and offer an element of careers advice, especially for their area of expertise.
3. Each department in all schools has a careers co-ordinator who will work closely with the careers service and be responsible for the careers advice needs of the department.

## Representation

### Right Four: The right to effective, independent representation at course, school and college level

The representation system in place at Salford is designed to ensure that the student voice is heard at all levels of the University (see diagram opposite). The system allows students to effect change for themselves and their peers by having input into decisions made at a variety of University meetings, and there have been many success stories.

However, in order for the system to be effective it needs to have buy-in and commitment from all the key stakeholders, including University staff at all levels. The perceived value of the rep system appears to differ widely between schools and colleges, with some reps experiencing difficulty gaining the respect of the staff in their school. This problem is heightened by a fear of potential personal implications for students – over a quarter of respondents in a recent survey stated that they had not raised issues for fear that action would be taken against them.<sup>2</sup>

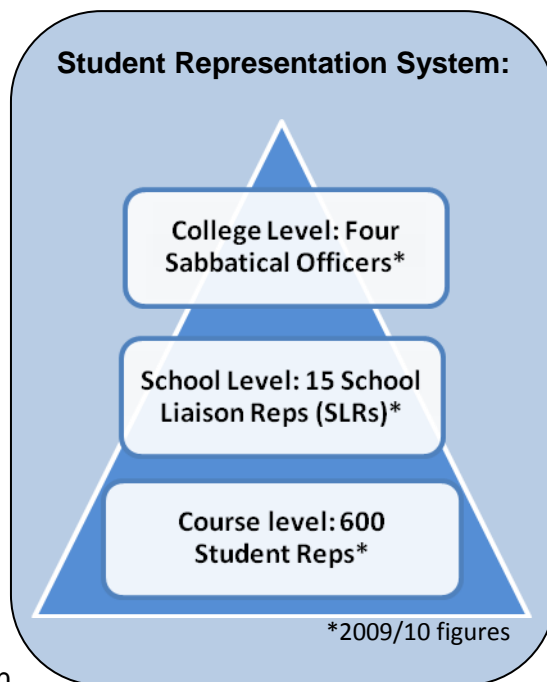
Students' Union staff with responsibility for the development of the rep system often experience difficulty in obtaining the names and contact details of newly elected reps from school staff. In order to carry out their role effectively, it is important that the reps receive training and support from the Union and are provided with an understanding of the structures and processes involved in the system. Prompt communication from the schools is therefore vital to ensure the Union can contact reps early in the year, before they are asked to attend any formal programme or school meetings. The lack of consistency in terms of meeting times, format and structure is also concerning.

It is clear that there are examples of excellent practice. The School of Law is particularly worthy of note for its commitment to the rep system, which involves full elections for reps (including public hustings) and continuing consultation with students over proposed changes and improvements made to the academic programme. But there is not a consistent experience for reps throughout the University, and this is something that needs urgent attention.

The student representation system is key in solving the other problems outlined in this document. If the representation system is used to its full potential then many of the day to day student complaints would be dealt with quickly and at a local level.

### Recommendations

1. The University should ensure that an institution-wide policy is created to ensure that all courses at all levels (including Postgraduate Research Courses) have fairly elected reps.
2. Contact details of all student reps should be shared with the Students' Union within the first month of the start of the course to maximise training opportunities for the reps.
3. The University should take steps to ensure that all staff undertake training on the value of the rep system and its place in decision making processes.
4. The University should ensure consistency in practice of the administration of the system including timing of meetings, agendas, minutes etc.



<sup>2</sup> 'Rate your Union' survey 2009, University of Salford Students' Union

## Learning Resources

### Right Five: The right to appropriate, high quality learning resources

Quality learning resources are not limited solely to library resources but include anything which aids or facilitates study. Examples include computing suites, software applications, laboratory equipment, study rooms and access to personal tutors.

The University of Salford offers a broad range of academic courses, resulting in the need for a wide variety of resources. It is vital that students studying for a course are provided with sufficient resources in order to successfully complete their studies; no student should be disadvantaged because of a lack of resource for their chosen subject.

We are pleased that the University has chosen to extend the library opening hours on campus to 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the main library (Clifford Whitworth) this has had a huge impact in enabling students to use both the library and computing facilities after normal working hours.

It should be noted however, that students on many courses need specialist resources which are not always available for extended periods. For example many students studying in the school of Music, Media and Performance media students require access to Apple mac computers for video editing and audio post production, yet this equipment is only available from Monday to Friday, between 9am and 5pm, as is the specialist software and computing suites in the journalism newsrooms<sup>3</sup>. This level of availability inevitably disadvantages students who may not be able to use facilities during normal working hours. Inconsistencies between schools and colleges also mean that there is huge variation in access to office facilities for postgraduate research students, with many unable to store work and study at a designated office.

#### Salford students said:

“There is a definite shortage of digital media books in the library”.

“The computers in the library don't have the programmes that I needed”.

“Poor library and IT resources. Not enough group rooms so have to prepare a long time in advance, which is not always an option”.

“Unable to contact personal tutors one to one support is limited”.

**NSS responses 2010**

#### Case Study: I.T. Facilities

My course requires the use of specialist computer software which due to its high cost is limited to only a certain amount of PCs in the Newton building, accessible Monday to Friday, 9am to 4:30pm. Extended availability would make assignments and course related work much easier to complete.  
Second year Mechanical Engineering student

Another resource vital to the learning experience is that of the personal tutor system. One to one meetings with personal tutors can be hugely beneficial from both an academic and pastoral perspective, and their value has been commented on by students from schools with effective systems. There are however many students who report not having a personal tutor, or knowing how to contact them if they do. Consistency in practice across the University would ensure that all students have access to regular contact with a dedicated personal tutor.

### Recommendations

1. The University should conduct a review of out-of-hours resource availability and ensure that colleges and schools work together to ensure that facilities are available for all students outside of normal working hours.
2. The University should invest in more hardware and software applications to enable students at the 24 hour library to use them, or borrow them where possible.
3. The University should ensure consistency in practice of the Personal Tutor system, providing all students access to one-to-one meetings with a designated tutor.

<sup>3</sup> Information obtained from the School of Media, Music and Performance.

## Academic Conduct

### Right Six: The right to advice and guidance on good academic practice

In order to meet high academic standards, it is important that students receive adequate teaching and guidance on good academic practice, including correct referencing. Not all students come to university with a prior knowledge of what constitutes academic misconduct, or how to avoid it.

Every student has the right to receive quality training in the methods of academic good practice. This is to enable students not only to produce assignments to an appropriate standard, but to understand learning in Higher Education and also to develop important skills that they will be able to use should they want to take their academic career further.

The University publishes guidance on avoiding academic misconduct in student handbooks, and runs workshop sessions during Welcome Week. However, students are often falling foul of academic regulations without having any knowledge of what those regulations are, what they mean and the consequences of breaking them. It is clear that significant tutoring is needed throughout the course of study, rather than at the very beginning of a course. It is also important to include training on new methods of submission, including the online submission tool Turnitin.

#### Academic Misconduct

During the 2008/9 academic year, **169** students were reported for academic misconduct. **36** of these students were permanently expelled from the University.

The Schools of **Computing, Science and Engineering, Social Work, Psychology and Public Health, the Salford Business School** and **ESPaCH** report significantly more students for alleged academic misconduct.

Certain groups of students are disproportionately represented in the academic misconduct figures; namely **overseas students**, and **BME students**.

LTEC/10/73

### Recommendations

1. Every course at both undergraduate and postgraduate level should incorporate compulsory teaching on academic good practice, academic misconduct and the on-line submission tool Turnitin. This should constitute an important part of term time teaching and not just part of an induction week.<sup>4</sup>
2. All students should be given feedback on their style of referencing as well as the content of assessments, and where possible they should be assessed on their knowledge of academic good practice.
3. All staff should have a clear and consistent message of what constitutes academic good practice.

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<sup>4</sup> It is hoped that this compulsory element will form part of the 'personal engagement event' mentioned in the University's new 'Student Participation Policy'.

# Timetabling

## Right Seven: The right to well managed, organised timetables

For most students, academic timetables form the basis of their study planning and preparation. In order for timetables to be of maximum benefit, they need to be accurate, appropriate and available as early as possible. Many Salford students have responsibilities outside of their studies, such as part time employment or childcare. An advance timetable is essential in allowing these students to arrange their time appropriately. Compacted timetables can also be beneficial for those who commute to University; minimising the time and cost implications of the number of occasions students must travel to and from campus.

While it is commendable that the University has committed to year round timetabling for all students, it is clear that many students still do not have access to it. Course reps report that the cancellation of lectures, often at short notice and with ineffective communication is one of the most common issues raised by their classmates.

Only 62% agreed with the statement 'the course is well organised and is running smoothly' in the 2010 NSS results, and while there are schools with good results, the inconsistencies are wide; e.g. only 39% of students at the school of Media, Music and Performance agreed with this same statement.

### Salford students said:

"Timetabling goes to absurd extremes, such as one class first thing in the morning, then a five hour break until final period."

"Sometimes I feel lecture and seminars being cancelled at the last minute is frustrating as being a working parent as well as a full time student, I have to work very hard to keep to my timetable."

**NSS responses 2010**

### Case Study: Missed Classes

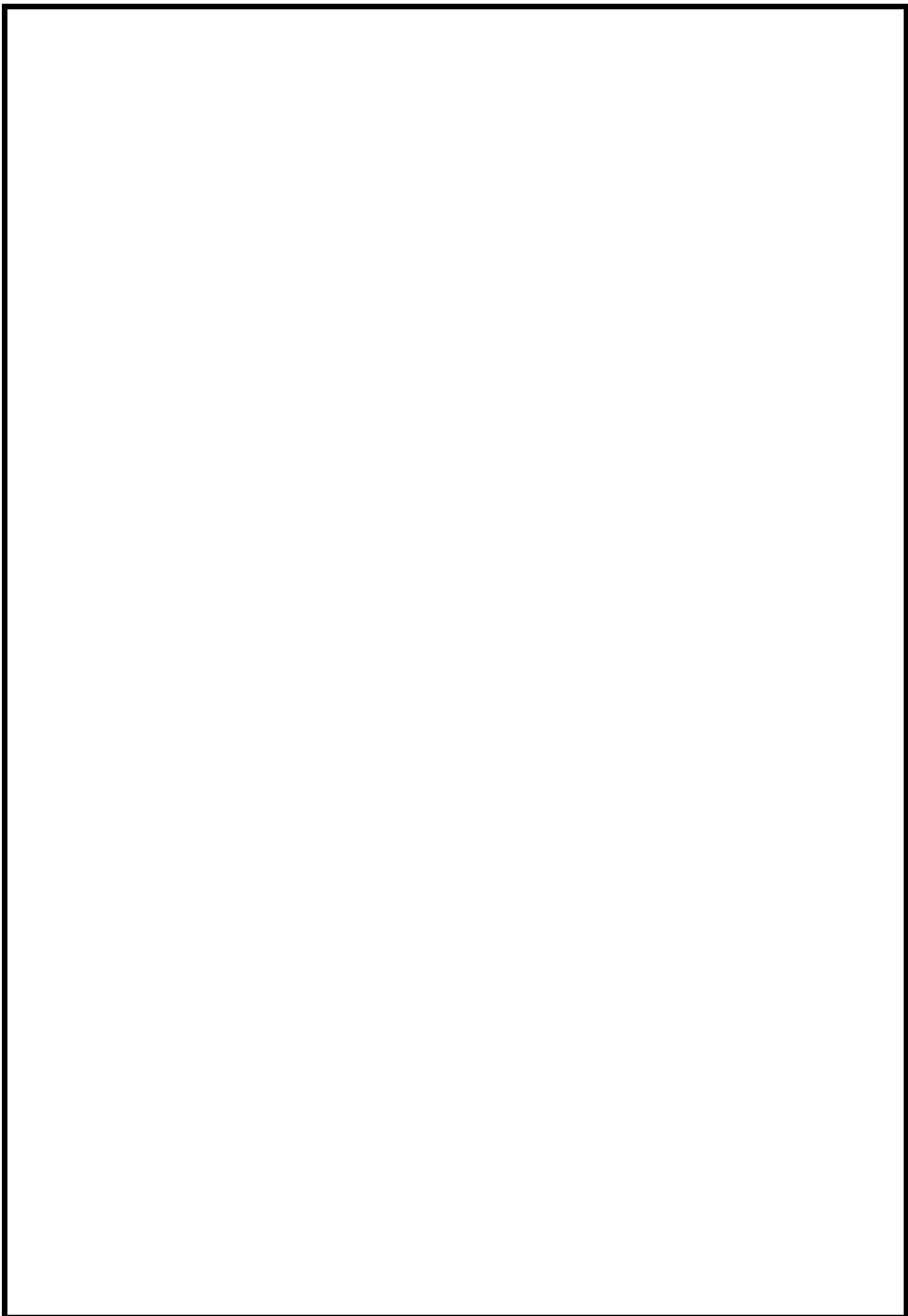
A student rep in the school of Social Work, Psychology and Public Health recorded all the classes that were cancelled, started late or finished early for one module in the first semester of this academic year. The rep reported that of 32 scheduled contact hours, only 24 were delivered in full. This amounts to 25% of the course being missed due to poor organisation.

Recent studies on student retention and progression have shown that participation in student-led activities, particularly joining clubs and societies, have a positive impact on students' overall sense of belonging and attitudes to university life, increasing their chances of remaining and progressing at university<sup>5</sup>. It is important that extra-curricular activity for personal as well as employability development should be easily accessible, and for that reason, Wednesday afternoons (from 1pm) have traditionally been kept free from regularly timetabled lectures and classes. National fixtures for University sport organised by British University and Colleges Sport (BUCS) are organised for Wednesday afternoons, meaning that students chosen to represent Salford University need clear timetables at this time. For students who do not participate in sports clubs, the time is valuable for a range of other activities from volunteering, fulfilling duties as a student rep, or undertaking work experience. It is vital that schools continue to keep this time clear so that all students have equal access to such activities and enjoy a more rounded university experience.

## Recommendations

1. Yearly timetables are available for all students, and any subsequent changes clearly communicated at the earliest opportunity.
2. Timetables are arranged in the best interest of the student ensuring that where possible classes are compacted to avoid a 'spread out' timetable.
3. The University should commit to keeping timetables free on Wednesday afternoons in order to increase the opportunities for students to undertake non-academic activities that contribute to their overall university experience.

<sup>5</sup> University of Leicester 2011, *The Student Retention and Success Project*. ([www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/projects/student-retention-project](http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/projects/student-retention-project))



## The Salford Bill of Student Rights: What next?

Thank you for taking the time to read the Salford Bill of Student Rights. Following a student consultation period during which over 1000 students rated the importance of each of the rights, and offered feedback on specific sections, we have made adjustments to the document and are now ready to present it formally to the University.

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### Launch event

**Tuesday 5 April 2011 1:30pm**  
**Ground floor, Clifford Whitworth Library**

All students and staff are invited to the official launch of the Salford Bill of Student Rights. The Sabbatical Officers will present the document to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic), Professor Huw Morris, and will answer questions from staff and students about the content of the Bill and the next steps in ensuring its adoption by the University.

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### The Bill of Rights: On the road

<b>Monday 4 April</b> <b>12 – 4pm</b>	<b>Tuesday 5 April</b> <b>10am – 4pm*</b>	<b>Thursday 7 April</b> <b>10am – 4pm</b>
<b>Maxwell foyer</b>	<b>Allerton foyer</b>	<b>Adelphi foyer</b>

\*As this is the day of the launch, the stall will not be manned from 1pm-3pm

The Sabbatical Officers will be around campus throughout the week of the launch, asking students about their experiences of assessment and feedback. This was the area which attracted the highest number of responses during the consultation period, and will be the focus of the campaign for the remainder of this term.

We are still keen to hear your views on the Bill of Rights, so please feel free to get in touch via the website [www.salfordstudents.com/rights](http://www.salfordstudents.com/rights), through email [president-ussu@salford.ac.uk](mailto:president-ussu@salford.ac.uk) or by speaking to one of your Sabbatical Officers.

**Thank you**  
**Your Sabbatical Officer Team 2010 / 11**

**Ricky Chotai**  
**Jim Dale**  
**Caroline Dangerfield**  
**Christabel Brown**  
**Maros Kravec**