

Learner Support Services Annual Report 2007-2008

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Making a real impact: a brief summary of Learner Support Services activities during 2007/08

"Why do we need an annual report?" "who's going to read it anyway?" "I can't face collecting a load of boring statistics that nobody's going to look at ..."

As I came to the end of my first year in post as Director of Learner Support Services, I made the innocent suggestion that it might be worth reflecting on this year and producing a brief annual report. It's fair to say there were some doubts expressed as to the value of this ... but I believe it will be useful as a means of summarising progress, celebrating success and highlighting areas for future development. To make it as painless as possible we took an hour out of the LSS Board's September Away Day to produce a series of post-it notes in groups, recording the highlights (and lowlights) of the previous year.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in Learner Support Services for your hard work during this past year. We have all faced challenges at different times, and had to work through difficult periods to achieve success. Thanks to your professionalism and dedication we have achieved a great deal, and we continue to deliver more as a combined team than would have been possible if we had continued to operate as discrete units. "Onwards and upwards", as they say - or at least as I seem to keep saying. Must find a new catch-phrase for 2008/09 ...!

1. Learner Support Services

- 1.1. The "new" Learner Support Services had been some time in the making by the time I joined as the new Director in July 2007. Under the interim leadership of Geoff Layer as PVC Learning and Teaching a provisional structure had been developed and teams had begun to work together in four Divisions. The consolidation of this structure and the formal establishment of Heads of Division has been a lengthy process that has taken most of the year to complete. It is pleasing therefore to report that the four Divisions are now starting to become embedded and to work effectively both within and across the Divisional structure.
- 1.2. LSS has taken opportunities during the year to work more closely with related services in Schools and other Directorates, with improved links between the LDU and the Language Unit and also between central IT teams and those based in Schools. Strong working relationships with the Hub, the SAINT team and the Students' Union have continued to be valuable in providing integrated services to students.

Learner Support Services

enabling personal, professional and academic development for students and staff



The move [...] to LSS has provided an opportunity for the Counselling Service to redefine itself within the University as it has moved from being within a department that "supports" in a "looking after" way into a department that considers the support needs of someone as a learner in a holistic sense. Thus psychological difficulties are considered alongside difficulties with writing essays, accessing IT facilities, wondering what career to pursue or finding a particular article, and are not partitioned off as something "other" that only the few "suffer" from. It has also expanded our referral options, so that we no longer mainly refer to those departments we are familiar with [...], but have an increased confidence and knowledge in referring students on for study skills, computer problems, careers advice etc *Mary Dailey*

'I thought this afternoon's meeting [of the LSS public relations group] was an excellent example of the wider LSS in action and the benefits closer co-operation can generate in terms of a more seamless coordinated service for the student. It is not only the joint planning, the picking up of snippets of relevant information from a range of different sources both inside and beyond LSS (instead of living in silos without knowing the relevant contacts), the greater promotional impact, more momentum with more ideas flying around and more bodies to contribute – it is also the sharing of good practice and the potential application of new technologies in other areas. So synergies and a joined up approach are the key benefits that I see.' *Grace Hudson*

2. Services

- 2.1. Maintaining robust and reliable IT systems across the University is essential to the effective delivery of services to students and staff. The IT division has provided ongoing support for key business systems including Finance (Powersolve), HR (ResourceLink), SAINT, Blackboard and the Library system (due for replacement in 2008/09), as well as for services such as car parking barrier control and card access to rooms. As in previous years the infrastructure to support Clearing was set up in the JB Priestley building and worked efficiently:

"Clearing is like decorating; it's all in the preparation!! I agree that centralisation of Clearing and our ability to take more control has helped enormously. My teams are heavily involved in the weeks and months leading up to the event and I have passed on my personal thanks to all of them for the meticulous planning and preparation effort." *Roger Goodair*

- New services introduced this year include:
 - online collection of DHLE statistics (around 20% of respondents used the online facility)
 - automation of exam scheduling via the JISC "thin client" project
 - introduction of "MyView" for staff access to their personal information held in ResourceLink
 - Launch of the Develop Me! social network for staff and students
- 2.2. Russell Allen continued to lead the Web Content Management System project supported by Claire Gibbons, Jon Bagshaw and Andy Walmsley. An extensive user consultation exercise took place early in 2008 resulting in the choice of Terminal 4 as the University's preferred solution, and this will be implemented during 2008/09.

- 2.3. LSS is committed to improving customer services in all our areas of work. Our new broad remit helps with this as we are better able to refer students from one part of the service to another if necessary (this is working particularly well within the Support, Progression and Employability Division where a visit to the Learner Development Unit could unearth issues with mental health that are best addressed in Counselling, or conversely a student presenting with dyslexia at the Disability Service can easily be referred to the LDU for study skills support). The Reception and Learner Support Centre services in the JB Priestley building handle both IT and Library-related enquiries, and frequently "go the extra mile" to resolve students' problems by liaising on their behalf with colleagues not only in LSS but also in Schools and in the Hub. Thanks to an initiative from Sophie North in Reception an improved system is now in operation for managing the creation of computer accounts for non-paid associate staff. This involved detailed work with HR and with IT colleagues to streamline various procedures, and demonstrates the importance of front-line staff noticing problems that occur frequently and involving others in finding ways to improve the service so as to avoid these problems happening in future.
- 2.4. In January 2008 Rae Earnshaw as PVC for Strategic Systems and Services led a wide-ranging review of MIS, collecting extensive and valuable customer feedback from colleagues right across the University. As anticipated the issues raised in this feedback relate to IT provision as a whole, and the recommendations from the Review Group's report will be taken forward in 2008/09 by the IT Division under the leadership of Graham Hill. This group had already begun to explore the use of the ITIL approach to service management (led by Dave Ewen), with 30 staff trained in the use of this framework during 2008, and a working group has now been established.

3. Student experience

- 3.1. Much time has been taken during 2007/08 in thinking about how to improve the physical learning environment provided for students and staff. The university's exercise in reprioritising its investments led to confirmation of £1M funding to refurbish the JB Priestley building with a further £4.8M assigned to improving the Communal Building. A highly successful consultation event for LSS staff and students took place in November in the Norcroft building, and external speakers including Les Watson (formerly of Glasgow Caledonian University) and Ian King from NUS Services led some lively debates about the importance of quiet space for private study, the need for students to have break-out space where food and drink can be consumed, and the value of dedicated group study rooms. The relationship of the Atrium to the Communal building, the relevance of spaces which do / don't serve alcohol, and the different preferences of our diverse student community were explored. Students

were very keen to see the Union building linking physically with the Library, noting that this would be key to increasing the footfall within a revitalised Communal building. Plans are still being refined at the time of writing, though it is probably fair to say that the suggestion that the Library should become "licensed for the sale of alcohol ..." etc is unlikely to be taken forward.

- 3.2. There is scope for some exciting developments on level 01 of the JB Priestley building, which would create new dedicated spaces for students to work in groups using technology, as well as some relaxation space (the concept of student "common rooms" found favour at the Senior Management Group residential event this year), but this is unlikely to be achievable within the current budget limit for this building.
- 3.3. It will be important during 2008/09 to seek clarification and final agreement on the budget and preferred options for building plans affecting LSS. It is important to get these decisions right and to view LSS developments in the context of the needs of the whole University, especially in the context of new requirements for learning and teaching; however both staff and students need to see improvements quickly if we are to maintain momentum and enthusiasm. It has also become increasingly difficult this year to deliver services effectively when the physical accommodation for many of our teams is poor and not organised to enable the full integration of services that our organisational structure now supports.
- 3.4. This year there has been a focus on engaging with students during the application and pre-arrival periods. Initiated by Becka Currant with the DevelopMe! website and the SaPRA online self-assessment tool, this theme has extended into the Hub where the pre-enrolment portal was developed by Simon Croll and colleagues. In support of this Geoff Bell, Steve McCain, Philip Briggs and Peter Jones successfully enabled the creation of IT accounts in advance of the student enrolment exercise, thus dramatically reducing the incidences of students being unable to log in and use essential services during the first few weeks of term, and making life much easier for those teaching PC-based induction sessions. The SAINT servers will be upgraded in time for next year's enrolment exercise, which should eliminate the teething problems experienced this year when the combination of pre-enrolments, HESA returns and exam board reporting overloaded the system and required a temporary shut-down of the pre-enrolment portal. Issues with re-set passwords failing to work on some systems are also now being addressed.
- 3.5. Becka's DevelopMe! Ning network has proved extremely effective in getting students to "meet" online before arrival in Bradford and make friends with others in the same accommodation or on the same course. It has also encouraged a flurry of Ning sites being set up by staff elsewhere in the University as colleagues explore for themselves the possibilities of social networking for work purposes. Thanks to all colleagues who have

responded to students' queries via DevelopMe!, and especially to Ruth Whitfield for moderating the service.

- 3.6. The Learner Development Unit has completed its first full year of operation and is now well-established as a vital and much-appreciated service by both students and staff. Helen Jackson joined the team as Numeracy Advisor and we said goodbye to Ian Duhig our Royal Literary Fund Fellow. During 2007/08 the team handled 2478 engagements with students (either one to one appointments, email/telephone advice or workshop sessions), and saw increased take-up from students in the School of Management and the School of Health in particular.

"I quite like Bradford uni its ok. still cant believe i passed the maths, but its given me confidence to learn the times tables with my kids, even the three year old is learning them now." *Quote by student*

"Just to say thank you for your help, has really made my life a lot easier in subsectioning my dissertation which I am doing now, and also have checked this website out and it really has a lot of resources, so thanks once again!"
Quote by student

4. Learning and Teaching

- 4.1. The "new" LSS encompasses a wide range of learning and teaching activity including both accredited modules and less formal workshops and seminars.
- 4.2. New staff were recruited in Career Development Services to support an increased teaching load, and we welcomed Steve Rook and Linda Holdsworth to the Career Development Advisers team, with Debbie Adams taking up the newly-defined post of Career Development Coach based within the School of Management.
- 4.3. With support from TQEG and the Learning Technology Team we are making increasing use of e-learning in delivering our teaching, with online resources being developed during the year to support employability, information literacy and a range of study skills. Hermione Berry has promoted the use of the "Destinations" resources via Career Development Services and the use of this resource was commended in the External Examiner's report. Subject librarians are exploring the use of the Qwizdom student response system for information skills training sessions as well as using Wink to create online animations to assist students in accessing different databases. Jason Maher and Shahid Rasul were successful in obtaining University funding to develop modules relating to Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, with these activities joining Employability

in a new "E3" initiative which will form one of the main elements of the University's revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy.

- 4.4. A second key theme in the new LTA strategy is Inclusion. Ron Harle, Peter Hartley and Helena Jones are members of the University's project team who worked last year with support from the Higher Education Academy to develop an institution-wide action plan embedding inclusivity in the curriculum. Implementing this plan will involve re-writing programme specifications and assessment criteria in an inclusive manner, and reviewing assessment procedures so as to minimise the need for individual adjustments and offer a greater level of choice and flexibility for all students. Funding has been approved for the development of a staff e-learning module on the inclusive curriculum, and this work will be undertaken during 2008/09.
- 4.5. Following an extensive period of trial and consultation during 2006/07 we used e-strategy funds to support the introduction of PebblePad as the University's preferred e-portfolio system. Neil Currant from TQEG has provided extensive training and support for staff and students wishing to develop their use of e-portfolios, and a number of LSS staff have used the system for their own reflections and for sharing information with others.
- 4.6. John Dermo has continued his excellent work in supporting staff to use computer-aided assessment effectively, while Sara Eyre was successful in obtaining funding from the JISC to support the development of a new teaching space equipped with 100 SunRay thin client computers, which will be suitable for large group teaching as well as large-scale computer-aided assessment.
- 4.7. The specialist teaching room 01.58 in the JB Priestley building has been used extensively during 2007/08. This room was equipped in the previous year with state of the art technology and new movable furniture, using funding from the LearnHigher CETL, and has been popular with staff wishing to engage students in group work. This room has become an exemplar of the kind of new teaching space that is required across the University, and colleagues in TQEG and the LDU have had considerable success in demonstrating the pedagogic value of the use of group work in teaching.
- 4.8. Building on the success of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, Peter Hartley has worked with senior managers to develop a framework for the professional development of teaching, which makes the PGCHEP compulsory for all new lecturing staff and provides structured CPD to recognise the expertise of those with more experience of teaching. This will be implemented during 2008/09 and will support the University's commitment to recognising excellence in teaching and learning.
- 4.9. We were delighted to celebrate the success of Ruth Whitfield in winning the prestigious Baroness Lockwood Award for Distinguished Teaching in

2008. Ruth's excellent teaching on the "Communication in an Information Age" module was recognised with this award, and in particular her ability to support individual learners to gain confidence in the use of technology through personal development planning and the experience of working within a diverse group. Ruth's achievement followed on from the achievement of this same award last year by Becka Currant. Can we make it a hat trick in 2009?

- 4.10. People Development has continued to support University staff in a wide range of personal and professional development activities. Nine staff (including Helena Jones from LSS) completed the CMI Diploma in Management Studies with several subsequently being appointed to more challenging leadership roles. Caroline Chambers and Pete Sayers established a new PG Certificate in Management and Leadership Development in conjunction with the School of Management towards the end of 2007/08 and this course will be running for the first time in 2008/09 as part of the University's range of leadership and management initiatives.
- 4.11. Our ECDL test centre was audited by the British Computer Society and gained an A rating, which is testimony to the excellent work put in by David Dodwell, Cath Hooson and Elaine Smith in supporting candidates undertaking both the ECDL and the NVQ in IT. Eleven candidates successfully achieved their qualification during 2007/08.

5. Research

- 5.1. The cost of maintaining our research collections in the Library continues to increase faster than the standard rate of inflation, and like many other HE libraries we have had to conduct a periodicals cancellation exercise this year. The subject specialists worked hard with Schools to identify less-used titles, and the exercise led to some useful discussions with Deans. We focussed on how the Library materials budget is divided between Schools (and between journals and other materials), and on the relative balance between different parts of the LSS budget overall. We have mitigated the impact of the spiralling costs of materials to some extent by taking account of planned savings on staffing, and by shifting the balance within the LSS budget itself, but this element of the budget will continue to be a cause for concern.
- 5.2. Peter Ketley was successful in obtaining a £30,000 grant from the JISC this year to create an institutional research repository for Bradford, and we were pleased to appoint Satu Nieminen as the project officer for BURP (Bradford University Repository Project). Informatics and EDT are the pilot Schools for this initiative for which funding continues until March 2009. Satu is working with academic colleagues to identify material for deposit in the Repository, clarifying copyright issues (often less of a problem than might be expected) and promoting the Repository as a proven means for raising the profile of institutional research and increasing citation counts.

- 5.3. The Research Assessment Exercise was concluded during 2007/08 and colleagues within MIS in particular had a key part to play in ensuring that all the University's information was collected and returned correctly. This exercise highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to IT systems that support research, which range from managing grant applications and monitoring expenditure through staff workload monitoring and the recording and disseminating of research outputs.
- 5.4. The Graduate School is now part of LSS and we were pleased to be able to recruit two new colleagues to this small team at the end of 2007/08, bringing the team back to something like full strength and enabling a long-awaited refocussing of activity around the key areas of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research postgraduate seminar series has continued to run successfully with support from People Development and contributions from colleagues across the University, and we are working towards a closer partnership between the Graduate School and the Schools of Social & International Studies and Management. The School has gained from being part of the larger LSS and within that the new Centre for Academic Practice under the leadership of Peter Hartley.
- 5.5. Colleagues in TQEG supervised a number of PhD students this year, and have begun to develop a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Leadership as part of the University's new suite of leadership and management programmes.

6. External

- 6.1. The financial appendix shows new external activities begun during 2007/08, or for which funding was approved in this year. The JISC grant of £30,000 to Peter Ketley for the institutional research repository has already been mentioned above. Will Stewart is leading the ASEL (Audio-Supported Enhanced Learning) project in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire, with a £200,000 grant from the JISC. This project explores the use of audio within next-generation technologies to improve the learner experience in three key areas: self-reflection, assessment and collaborative learning. Sare Eyre obtained a further £203,000 from the JISC to support the development of Computer-Aided Assessment using thin-client technology, and this fund has contributed towards the development of a 100-seater SunRay cluster on F floor of the Richmond Building as well enabling the recruitment of Rick Graves to develop software to improve the scheduling of exams with particular reference to students with disabilities.
- 6.2. The Higher Education Academy funded Pathfinder project was completed during 2007/08, supporting the development of the self-assessment tool SaPRA and its use in helping students make the transition from school into HE, together with extensive training and guidance materials on the use of Computer-Aided Assessment.

- 6.3. Graham Hill was appointed to the UCISA Executive Committee as Conference Chair with responsibility for planning and organising the annual UCISA conference in 2009. Peter Hartley continued in the role of JISC "critical friend" and provided external consultancy to the Solstice project at the University of Edgehill. Becka Currant organised the 5th Learner Developers in Higher Education Network Symposium (LDHEN) conference at Bradford this year.

7. Finance

LSS Management Accounts year end 2007/08		
	Budget (£)	Actual (£)
Income		
Core income (HEFCE T and overseas)	494,496	470,498
Other income	1,254,377	1,339,010
Total	1,748,873	1,809,508
Expenditure		
Staff	5,763,656	5,448,599
Operating costs	3,080,734	3,086,785
Depreciation	106,815	114,454
Pensions/PRCS	3,336	4,023
Total	8,954,541	8,653,861
Overhead	7,225,000	7,225,152
Surplus (deficit)	19,332	380,799
Commitments carried forward to 2008/09		250,799
Actual surplus (deficit) for 2007/08		130,000

Externally-funded projects beginning in 2007/08			
Funding organisation	Project Title	Award	Project Leader
JISC	ASEL users and innovation programme	£200,000	Will Stewart
JISC	E-assessment using thin client technology	£203,200	Sara Eyre
JISC	Bradford University Repository	£ 30,000	Peter Ketley
JISC	Evaluating Systematic Transition	£ 35,000	Becka Currant
	TOTAL	£468,200	