

University of Leicester

Students' Union

Distance Learner and Part-Time Student Engagement Strategy

2010 - 2011

Written by:

Owen Jones

Campaigns & Involvement Officer

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Introduction

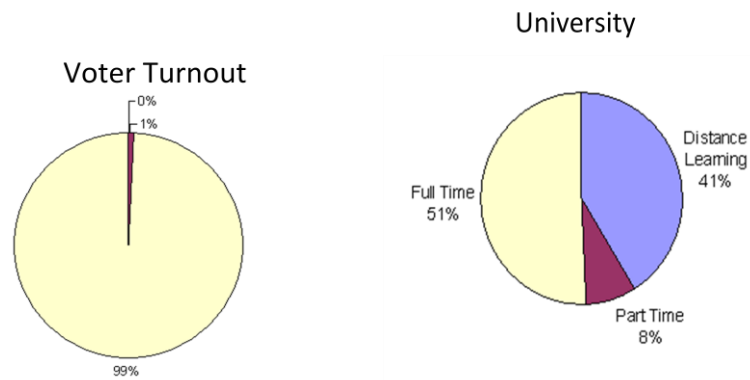
The mission of the University of Leicester Students' Union is:

"The advancement of education of Students at the University of Leicester for the public benefit by: promoting the interests and welfare of Students at the University of Leicester during their course of study and representing, supporting and advising Students; being the recognised representative channel between Students and the University of Leicester and any other external bodies; and providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities, and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its Students."

This paper covers two very distinct student demographics, which are common in the respect that the Students' Union traditionally offers very little provision for either cohort. Over the past decade The University of Leicester rapidly expanded the Institute for Lifelong Learning, who deal with both of these student groups, and the Union, until recently, has failed to react.

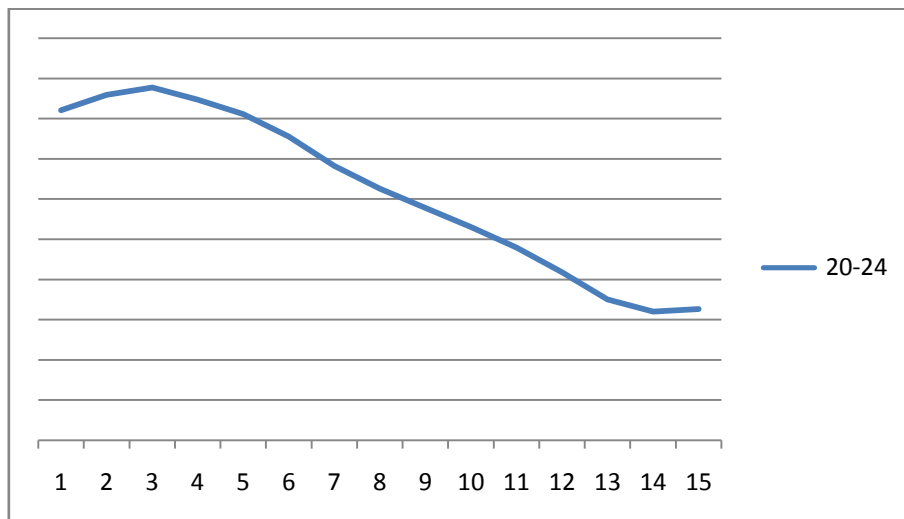
In recent times the Union has begun to tackle the increasing problem of student representation of both distance learners and part-time students. Most of the work has revolved around *Vaughan College*, a Teaching and Learning Center (the term for the University's satellite campuses) which specialises in Part-Time courses. The Students' Union Executive now makes regular visits to the students studying there and has expanded the Course Rep System to include Vaughan College. Plans for 2010 include holding a mini "Freshers' Fair" at Vaughan and electing the first Vaughan College representative onto the new Union Parliament. Work regarding Distance Learners has been somewhat slower, due to the nature and location of their study. However, there have been a few small positives. 2009/10 saw the beginning of a strong dialogue between the Union and all the departments of the University that deal with DLs and also the creation of the Hong Kong Students Association, as a hub for the Union's members in Hong Kong.

Currently the normal measure of engagement used by the Students' Union is voter turnout during the Executive Officer elections. Turnout from these two groups was poor.



Based on the 2010 results shown above, both Distant Learner and Part-Time Student engagement is far below where the Union would like it to be. The purpose of this strategy is to outline methods by which the Students' Union can overcome traditional boundaries to engagement and create the correct provisions to fully include both community demographics within the Union.

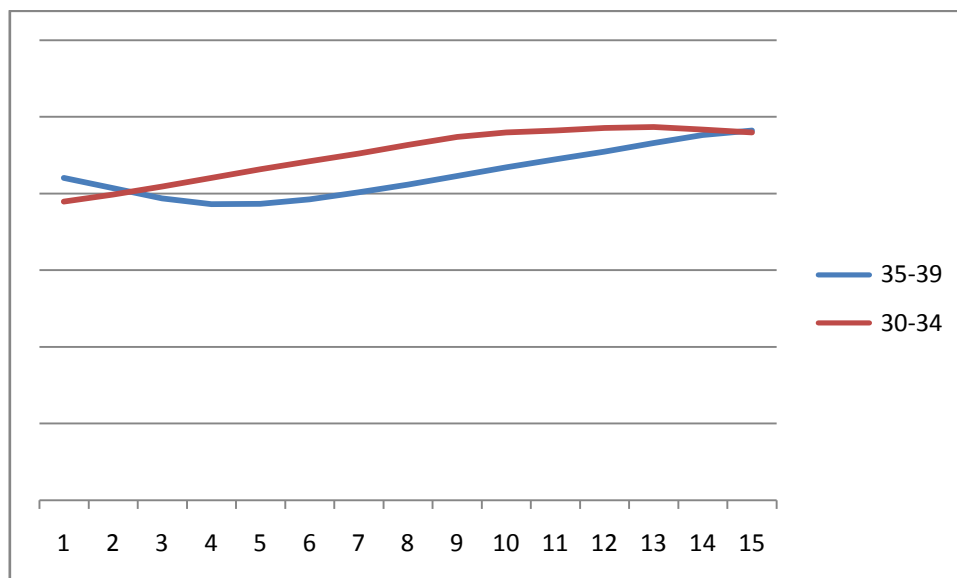
Looking to the future it is imperative that the Union begins to look towards long-term provision for these student bodies. Evidence from the Office of National Statistics clearly shows the decline in the number of 20-24 year olds in the UK over the next fifteen years¹.



Where as, the number of 30-34 and 35-39 year olds, the main age groups for this demographic, are projected to rise over the same period. Little inference is needed to calculate the likelihood that the Union will see further growth in its membership from Distance Learner and Part-Time students,

¹ Office of National Statistics, *Projected populations at mid-years by age last birthday in five year age groups*, 2008-based National Population Projections, October 2009

further stressing the importance of more established and sustainable engagement.



Aims of the Engagement Strategy

- To raise awareness of both Distance Learner and Part-Time student issues
- To work alongside the University and relevant Union bodies, and external stakeholders when necessary, to enhance Distance Learner and Part-Time Student provision
- To represent Distance Learner and Part-Time Student interests.
- To be part of a wider strategy to improve engagement with the Union's hard to reach student demographics.

This strategy is more focused on engaging with Part-Time Students. This is not because they are seen as more important and nor because they are the easier group to engage. Union engagement with Distance Learners is still in its extreme infancy, with 99% of Distance Learners unaware that they are members of the Students' Union. Thus, until the Union has formed robust links with our Distance Learner population it would seem highly ambitious of the Union to try to carry out too grand a strategy to engage Distance Learners over the next academic year.

Strategic Areas

Communication

- Communicating University and sector issues, networking and training opportunities, student representation and the availability of student support service and processes.

Induction

- Engagement with first year Part-Time Students over "Freshers' Week" and subsequent induction periods. "Welcome" communication to new Distance Learners.

Representation

- To work towards Union Parliament having the correct proportional representation of Part-Time Students and to campaign on both Distance Learner and Part-Time Student issues to both the University and nationally.

Participation

- Promoting and developing Part-Time Student involvement in Union societies, volunteering services and awareness and use of University support services to both Distance Learners and Part-Time Students.

Research

- Investigation of surveys, studies and reports carried out by the Union, the University or external bodies, to develop a detailed assessment of both Distance Learner and Part-Time Student interests and opinion of existing provision at the University of Leicester and across the sector.

Academic

- Working alongside the University and relevant Union bodies to address Distance Learner and Part-Time Student course and study-based concerns.

Area	Activity	Aim	Method	Target Group	Timescale
Communication	Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase the number of DL and P/T students accessing the Union's website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with the Union's marketing team to create a DL and P/T section of the website, focused on their needs - Track website traffic by page and develop site accordingly 	All DLs and P/Ts	From July 2010
	Facebook Fan Page (and Twitter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase membership to the P/T student fan page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote PG news and events. - Promote with an advert 	All P/Ts	Sept 2010 onwards
Induction	Freshers' Festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan, organise and deliver events during Freshers' that are directly targeted towards P/Ts - Mini Freshers' fair at Vaughan College 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan a couple of events during Freshers' for PGs - Union info point at Vaughan College and sell NUS Extra Cards - Publicise events through appropriate media 	1 st Year P/Ts	Sept/Oct 2010
	Presentations at University inductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicise the role of the Union within the P/t community - Promote involvement with the Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss the role of Union within the context of Union/University cooperation 	1 st Year P/Ts	Sept/Oct 2010
	Welcome Letter from the Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicise the fact that DLs are still full members of the Union - Publicise the role of the Union within the DL community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss the role of Union within the context of Union/University cooperation 	1 st Year DLs	Sept/Oct 2010

Representation	Union Parliament Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the benefit of P/T involvement in Union Parliament - Ensure that there are a substantial number of P/T candidates running in the elections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicise elections through mediums that are commonly used by P/Ts - Targeted marketing to P/Ts 	All P/Ts	Oct 2010
	Executive Elections (candidates)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the benefits and opportunities of being a Sabbatical Officer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicise elections through mediums that are commonly used by P/Ts - Targeted marketing to P/Ts 	All P/Ts	Dec 2010/Jan 2011
	Executive Elections (voters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the need and relevance to vote in the elections - Increase the DL and P/T turnout in elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publicise elections through mediums that are commonly used by both DLs and P/Ts - Targeted marketing to PGs 	All DLs and P/Ts	Feb 2011
	Develop links with NUS P/T Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To become more aware and involved in the national issues affecting P/Ts - To have a member of the Union on the Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend The NUS National Part Time Student Conference - Develop a dialog with existing members of the NUS PTC 	All P/T Course Reps	Aug 2010 - May 2011
	Develop provision for DLs within NUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Campaign for a DL Officer/focus group within NUS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motion to NUS National Conference - Addressing the issues at all relevant NUS events 	All DLs	Aug 2010 – May 2011

Distance Learner and Part-Time Students Engagement Strategy 2010-2011

	Campaign on P/T issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase the relevance of the Union to the P/T community - Create positive change for P/Ts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research issues that affect P/Ts - Plan a campaign(s) accordingly 	All P/Ts	Aug 2010 – June 2011
Participation	Increase P/T participation in SU activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet with P/T reps to discuss P/T participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight high and low areas of awareness and participation for P/Ts and formulate possible ways of increasing these. - Discussion of potential reasons for variation in P/T participation in range of volunteer functions and activities. - Develop strategies for increasing participation where appropriate. 	All P/Ts	Pending
Research	P/T Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research P/T participation statistics for all SU Societies, Sports teams, Media groups and Associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review participation statistics for each area 	All P/Ts	Nov 2010
	DL and PG involvement and use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct "DL and P/T Opinion Survey" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research areas of the Union where these students experience access barriers 	All DLs and P/Ts	Feb 2011
	PG Freshers' Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research P/T satisfaction with P/T Freshers' Week activities and communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review individual event satisfaction - Review communication 	1 st year P/Ts	Oct 2010

Distance Learner and Part-Time Students Engagement Strategy 2010-2011

			satisfaction		
Academic	Academic support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To increase the academic support a representation to both P/Ts and DLs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue the Education Unit's efforts at Vaughan College and begin to spread to Northampton, when possible - Promote the work of the Education Unit to DLs 	DLs and P/Ts	Sept 2010 onwards
	Promote the Education Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To make DL students aware of the academic representation and advice service provided by the Union 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater use of on line promotion to target this demographic. - To initially trial this with home DL students 	Home DLs	Sept 2010 onwards

