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**Established** to promote excellence  
in university research and teaching

## **Policy Report**

November 2007

# **Enhancing the Student Experience**

# ‘Enhancing the Student Experience’

## Policy Report

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## **Foreword: The 1994 Group**

The 1994 Group represents nineteen of the UK's most research-intensive and internationally renowned universities.<sup>1</sup> The 1994 Group's mission is to promote excellence in research and teaching. Seeking to promote excellence in the student experience is therefore at the very heart of what we do. Each member institution delivers an extremely high standard of education to its students, demonstrating excellence in teaching and academic support, and providing learning in a research-rich community. We focus also on extra-curricular activity and we believe that encouraging students to aspire to be their best both academically and in whatever they do outside their study is central to delivering the very best student experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the 1994 Group are: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of Warwick and University of York.

# Executive Summary

## What is the Student Experience?

'Student Experience' is a wide-ranging term meaning different things to different kinds of students. An 18-year-old undergraduate or foundation degree student, living away from parents for the first time, discovering independence, has a very different experience of university to a 40-year-old masters student, living at home with partner and children, balancing a full-time job with part-time study. In turn, both encounter a vastly different experience to that of a student from China, who is getting to know a new language and culture as well as new learning material. Furthermore, there are many different aspects of university life which affect the experience of students, from the quality of teaching, level of academic support and provision of learning and library space to the opportunities for volunteering, sport and other extra-curricular activities, work-based learning and paid work and access to bars, cafes and other social spaces.

In short there are many different student 'experiences' to be found across the spectrum of higher education and even across the same campus. This variation is further increased by the different systems for funding and support found in the UK. Importantly, the school-leaver, the mature student, the international and all other types of student have varying expectations of the experience they hope to receive. In an era of widening participation, varying fee and support structures, rapid globalisation, international competition and technological change, the experiences and expectations of students are changing continuously.

The challenge for universities is to keep abreast of the shifting expectations of an increasingly diverse and informed student population and to adjust accordingly to provide the best possible experience to each of them. This is a challenge not only for universities but also for policy-makers and all student-facing groups across the sector if UK HE is to continue to be one of the leading higher education providers in the world. In response to the changing environment of student experiences and expectations, 1994 Group institutions are redefining the roles of students and setting themselves up to give the best support possible as they live out these various roles at university. In summary, the roles of the modern student include: Learner, Citizen, Colleague, Consumer, Scholar, Ambassador; but perhaps the most important role of all is Partner.

## The Role of the 1994 Group's 'Enhancing the Student Experience' project

In recognition of this need for focus on the student experience, the 1994 Group initiated its 'Enhancing the Student Experience' project in Summer 2006. This project investigates the key developments regarding aspects of the student experience, drawing on outcomes of the recent increase in information on this issue, and identifies the challenges faced by the sector if we are to meet student expectations. This statement recommends to the sector, funding councils, government and stakeholder bodies the areas of research and activity in which we should engage in order to understand more fully and enhance the student experience.

The 1994 Group is an appropriate group to lead this debate, as the student experience is an area in which its members have particular expertise. Three years of the National Student Survey (NSS) have consistently demonstrated that undergraduate students in 1994 Group institutions are extremely satisfied with the experience they receive. An aggregate taken from the three years' results shows that five 1994 Group institutions are ranked in the top six of this table. The Group's average scores are also well above the average for the sector,

and indeed the averages of all other university groupings. This national survey data is backed up by institutional surveys of postgraduate student satisfaction and the results of the I-Graduate survey of the international postgraduate and undergraduate experience, which shows significant levels of international student satisfaction in many different areas in comparison to the sector.

Complementing the outcomes of these surveys are the results of a unique survey funded by the 1994 Group and conducted by Unions94, students' union representatives from across the 1994 Group. The results of the Unions94 Survey 2007 provided for the first time a rich and detailed picture of the fundamentally important role that the non-academic aspects of the student experience play in our institutions. The survey suggests an interesting relationship between student engagement in non-academic activity, the provision of high quality teaching and the excellence of the student experience.

## **A Partnership Approach**

A key objective throughout this project has been to engage with as many stakeholders as possible in order to broaden the debate, to test conclusions, and to identify work to be taken forward in partnership.

A primary focus has been to discuss the issues and challenges directly with students and their representatives, an extremely important approach which has perhaps not been used enough by the sector during this essential debate. The National Union of Students (NUS) has been engaged from an early stage in this project, and has contributed greatly to shaping the report and identifying areas of research and activity on which to work in partnership in the future. Also, in July 2007, the 1994 Group organised a conference at which students' union staff and officers from across the Group, along with NUS representatives, came together to debate the issues and challenges relating to the student experience, to consider outcomes from the Unions94 Survey 2007, to strengthen their networks and to share best practice. The development of a network of partners across the sector, with institutions, students' unions and the NUS at its heart, is essential for meeting the challenges of the future.

Furthermore, the Group has engaged with a wide variety of key stakeholders to discuss the student experience and the 'Enhancement' project. In June 2007, the Group brought together for the first time stakeholder groups including government departments, funding councils, policy-makers, business and a range of other HE organisations to debate the core issues emerging from our research, to shape the final conclusions of the report and to identify areas to take forward in partnership.

## **REPORT CONCLUSIONS:**

### **A Snapshot of the Student Experience in 2007**

In its research the Group has sought to understand the complex factors which affect the experience of all types of students in UK Higher Education; to identify the principal challenges faced by the sector if we are to continue to meet student expectations and enhance their experience in the coming years. As noted above, the student experience is such a wide-ranging term, influenced by such a complex variety of factors that it is fruitless to attempt to define it as a single 'thing'. In light of this, a more useful approach to understanding the student experience is to take a 'snapshot', a current view of the various factors affecting students, which draws together recent research and developments, and

identifies the challenges for the sector to address. The following factors make up the 1994 Group's snapshot of the student experience in 2007.

Higher Education has been undergoing significant changes over the past two decades, and no group has been affected more by these changes than students. International and postgraduate students across the UK have been paying tuition fees since the 1980s, and this was the real beginning of the HE student marketplace. The creation of a marketplace naturally affects the choices students make when they embark on their university life and their expectations of what they should receive. In the UK, the introduction of undergraduate fees in 1997 increased these expectations and they were increased further in England in 2006 under the new system of variable fees for full-time undergraduates. The increasing importance of the 'student voice' is reflected in England by the appointment in October 2007 of the first Minister for Students and the formation of an independent National Student Forum which will advise ministers on student issues.

The good news is that students continue to be excited and engaged by higher education and continue to see it as an important stage in their own development. Despite variable fees applications to HE have continued to rise and many recent student surveys have indicated that students are satisfied and engaged with their university life. English institutions, in receipt of variable tuition fees, have launched ambitious investment plans designed to meet the increased expectations of students. This has included enhancing faculty numbers, teaching resources and student accommodation. Institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have yet to receive the financial investment from fees, have likewise been under increased pressure to improve faculty numbers and physical infrastructure and have responded accordingly. The move to a regulated student marketplace has been a success.

However, students find themselves in a swiftly changing environment and the future of higher education contains some large challenges for them and indeed for universities. Institutional investment in student support, scholarships and bursaries to widen participation and to attract the very best students from all backgrounds, places increased expectations on institutions to perform within this new market environment. Universities must also demonstrate continued and strengthened commitment to providing excellent teaching, support and facilities in order to ensure that the experience of university life continues to be as appealing to students as it has been in the past decade. They must achieve this within a relatively constrained funding environment. Furthermore, these funding constraints vary across the UK, with the devolved systems facing similar expectations from students as in England but receiving different levels of resource to meet them.

An increasingly competitive employment marketplace is another key factor playing a part in the experience of students. Research reveals that it is employability skills, often obtained outside the academic curriculum through engagement in extra-curricular activity such as volunteering, part-time work, sport, and students' union activity, which are most prized by government and employers, when they are coupled with high academic achievement. This puts different pressures on students who need to balance these non-academic aspects with academic work. Accordingly, the role of universities is changing in relation to these factors, with many increasingly encouraging and accrediting these extra-curricular activities as an essential part of the student programme.

The changing environment of fees and expectations has brought the nature of the relationship between student and university into focus, including an increasing emphasis from some on the idea of students as 'consumers', a notion which should be tempered with the recognition of students' and universities' roles as mutual partners in the development of people's knowledge, skills and experience, in order to shape their contribution to society. The new relationship places an increased responsibility on institutions to work in close

partnership with the NUS in recognition of its role as the national voice of students, as well as with local students' unions in their role as the voice of students on campus and providers of many aspects of the non-academic student experience.

In recent years there has been increasing availability of information relating to the student experience and a rising level of research into this area. However, our research has revealed that this has clearly not gone far enough and there are gaps to be filled. A wider availability of data relating to the student experience is required alongside a bank of high-level institutional data which will better inform the decisions of prospective students, allowing them to differentiate between various types of institutions in an increasingly diverse sector.

## 1994 Group: Leading the Student Experience Debate

Senior Management Teams at 1994 Group institutions focus a great deal of attention on the student experience and collectively the Group leads the debate and plays a prominent role in raising the issue to the top of the HE agenda. Across the Group there is evidence of excellent provision and support for students relating to both academic and non-academic aspects of their university life. There is evidence of very high levels of satisfaction amongst the students themselves. The NSS, a survey of final year undergraduates, is one clear example of the 1994 Group's success in this area, as Figures 1 & 2 demonstrate.<sup>2</sup>

**Fig. 1: NSS top six (from 3 year average 2005 – 2007)**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Institution	Teaching	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Organisation and management	Learning Resources	Personal development	Average Score (Columns B-G)	Overall satisfaction	
1. <b>St Andrews</b>	88	77	83	86	75	84	82	89	
2. Oxford	88	76	84	80	94	84	84	88	
3. <b>Leicester</b>	85	75	81	82	84	83	82	87	
4. <b>Birkbeck</b>	86	76	77	79	77	80	79	86	
5. <b>Loughborough</b>	83	75	82	85	87	83	82	85	
6. <b>East Anglia</b>	84	74	80	81	85	83	81	85	

**Fig. 2: NSS results (3 year average 2005-2007)**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Group	Teaching	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Organisation and management	Learning Resources	Personal development	Average Score (Columns B-G)	Overall satisfaction	
<b>1994 Group</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>71.3</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>79.3</b>	80.0	80.1	<b>78.4</b>	<b>82.9</b>	
Sector	79.9	70.5	75.6	75.0	79.9	80.1	76.9	80.1	

This is supported by evidence from institutions' surveys of postgraduate student satisfaction and outcomes of the I-Graduate survey of international students' experiences, which covers postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students, as well as undergraduates. International students at 1994 Group institutions show high satisfaction in comparison to the sector, particularly in areas relating to student support ranging from assistance with finances and accommodation upon arrival, the support of careers services and graduate schools, the

<sup>2</sup> Results are a percentage score taken from a five-point scale. NSS results at Unistats website: <http://www.unistats.com/>

provision of faith and worship facilities, and the activities of the students' union (see Figure 3).<sup>3</sup>

**Fig. 3: 1994 Group compared to the International Student Barometer, Autumn 2006**

Selected Categories	% Satisfied		
	1994	ISB %	ISB +/-
Accommodation Office (on arrival)	75.9%	70.8%	5.1%
Careers Service	82.4%	78.5%	3.9%
Safety	88.8%	85.9%	2.9%
Finance Office (on arrival)	73.4%	70.7%	2.8%
International Office	87.6%	85.1%	2.5%
Counselling	86.4%	84.3%	2.1%
Faith Provision	83.8%	82.2%	1.7%
Students' Union	83.8%	82.1%	1.7%
Graduate School	87.7%	87.1%	0.6%
<b>All Categories</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>76.8%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>

The Group's position of leadership in the student experience debate is based upon each member's delivery of a distinctive and desirable student experience, which prepares all students extremely well for their future and towards making a significant contribution to society. The Group's strong position in this area is based on our members' collective commitment to the following key areas.

### **A Shared Community Ethos**

There is a distinct sense of community at members of the 1994 Group. On average, there are 10,000 students at member institutions, meaning they can operate on a personalised scale. But even our larger institutions apply the principle through very strong levels of student support. Most are campus based, and those that are not aim to create community in their physical environments. They also have excellent relationships with their students' unions, which, according to the Unions94 Survey 2007, are amongst the most active and engaged unions in the country. Overall, there is a real community ethos and willingness to work together to be found across the Group, demonstrated by the many policy and networking groups which meet under the 1994 Group banner.

### **Production of Exceptionally Employable Graduates**

Through a mix of top-quality academic experience and high level of extra-curricular activity, 1994 Group institutions produce very well-rounded and exceptionally employable graduates, at all levels, with a wealth of different experiences and life skills which are applicable and desirable in the workplace. It is extremely important that students are able to engage in the non-academic part of the student experience, even if they are balancing the pressures of part-time work, and 1994 Group institutions have responded by enhancing their provision of protected learning and accreditation schemes for non-academic activity. There is evidence across the Group of high levels of engagement and excellence in sport, volunteering and

<sup>3</sup> The "1994" Group results are averages of all responses from the 10 1994 Group institutions in the ISB Autumn Wave 2006. The "ISB" Group results are averages of all responses from the full 42 ISB institutions in the ISB Autumn Wave 2006. Data provided by I-Graduate: <http://www.i-graduate.org/>



students' unions societies and governance systems, underpinned by excellent opportunities for work placements and accreditation of employment-related skills.

### **Partnership of Learners**

1994 Group institutions have an ideal balance between excellence in research and teaching, two areas of activity which are mutually supportive and serve to reinforce each other. Importantly, institutions in the 1994 Group offer their students the opportunity to learn in a research-enriched community. Furthermore, the smaller scale of 1994 Group institutions ensures that knowledge is shared across subject boundaries rather than creating artificial physical or intellectual silos of learning. Across the Group, student-focused estate developments and provision of innovative learning spaces and facilities contribute greatly to providing the most convenient and engaging academic environment to students.

### **Joined-Up Student Journey**

1994 Group institutions engage as much as possible with students at every step on their educational journey, from engagement before and during admissions processes, providing excellent support and experiences during university life, encouraging progression through to postgraduate level, and conducting continued engagement with alumni. Moreover, they are institutions rich in cultural diversity with an international context that permeates all of their activity, and they are flexible institutions that recognise all levels and modes of study, all of which works to enhance the overall student journey.

## **Enhancing the Student Experience: Challenges for the Sector, 2007-2012**

This report has taken a snapshot of the various factors affecting the student experience across the UK sector. It has demonstrated the 1994 Group's particular position within this environment and the willingness of the Group to lead this important ongoing debate. It is now important to identify the challenges that the sector faces in taking forward the enhancement of the student experience over the next five years if UK HE is to retain, refocus and reinforce its world-leading position in this area and to respond to the new directions set out by government.

We conclude that there are **seven priority areas** for the sector to take forward if we are to meet the challenges of a changing environment of student experiences and expectations. The 1994 Group has begun detailed discussions with stakeholders to agree how these challenges will be met over the short to medium term. Detailed announcements on this ongoing work will emerge over the coming months. It is essential that the sector and government embrace these challenges and come together to see their implementation.

These **seven priority areas** are:

### **1) A requirement to provide transparent and accurate information around the student experience**

There is a need across the sector for a wider availability of data about the student experience, in order both to better inform the decisions of applicants at all levels, and also to help HEIs identify problem areas and work to enhance aspects of the student experience. Currently, sector agencies gather datasets on an annual basis, which provide a rich source of information on the nature of the sector, but these are not generally used for these purposes. The 1994 Group will work to ensure that such existing data which can enhance students' and other stakeholders' understanding of the student experience is made available in an effective way.

As the sole national indicator of its kind, the NSS is fundamental to understanding the undergraduate student experience and it must continue. The Group strongly supports the most positive outcome of the NSS, that it has enabled institutions to highlight areas which need attention and allowed them to focus efforts on directly enhancing aspects of the student experience in order to improve student satisfaction. The Group will continue to engage with the NSS steering group to ensure that the survey is developed towards maximum usefulness and is provided to applicants in the most helpful way. Of course, the NSS relates principally to undergraduate students, with also some importance for international students. The Group encourages a similar national survey for postgraduate students as this would also prove extremely useful and important to the sector. Excellent recent examples of what can be done are the launch of the Unistats web service, the reform of the UCAS HE entry tariff and entry profiles, the development of a centralised postgraduate admissions service (UKPASS), and the growing I-Graduate survey into international student expectations and experiences. However, there is a need to enhance these with even more accessibility of information.

## **2) Towards the 2020 Workforce: Promoting the well-rounded graduate**

It is fundamental that all graduates across the sector benefit in the best way possible from their higher education experience, and leave university as mature, well-rounded individuals with clearly recognisable skills which will help them in employment. The 1994 Group will strive to achieve recognition amongst the top employers and the sector skills councils for well-rounded graduates who benefit from excellent academic and non-academic experiences, and to ensure that the value of these graduates is understood. In recognition of employer demand for skills obtained outside the academic curriculum, universities should develop mechanisms to accredit non-academic activities such as volunteering. Also, in recognition of the need for students to support themselves financially while at university, this accreditation should be stretched to include skills obtained during paid employment, perhaps delivered in arrangement between university job shops and employers.

The Sainsbury Review<sup>4</sup> has identified the need for further information to be provided to students and employers around subject trends, graduate jobs and salaries, and subjects which employers and government believe have shortages of graduates with key skills. The review recommends that one way of ensuring data is as accurate and effective as possible is to reform the current 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education' survey, extending the time period so it tracks graduates three and a half years after leaving university. The 1994 Group will work with HEFCE to see the full implementation of these essential recommendations.

## **3) Promoting the student voice**

In a marketplace in which all students are increasingly being viewed, and viewing themselves, as consumers it is extremely important for universities across the sector to make a clear statement on the reciprocal relationship between students and their universities in the development of their knowledge and skills. The 1994 Group clearly supports this principle of partnership and, as part of this, it is engaged in joint activity with the NUS examining the relationship between universities and students' unions. This new approach requires a mature relationship to be developed between HE institutions, the NUS, and local students' unions so that mutual trust can be built

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<sup>4</sup> Lord Sainsbury of Turville, 'The Race to the Top: A Review of Government's Science and Innovation Policies,' October 2007.

up along with the recognition of the need to engage in sometimes challenging debates on these often controversial issues. We strongly believe that more can be achieved in partnership than in conflict and it is essential that the sector and the government promote and listen to the student voice. The creation of an independent National Student Forum and the appointment of Lord Triesman as the first Minister for Students are excellent steps in promoting the voice of English students. Alongside these developments the UK sector, the NUS, and local students' unions must proceed with practical steps to fully promote the student voice and implement a partnership approach to the student experience.

#### **4) Engagement with schools and colleges**

Effective engagement with schools and colleges is extremely important in efforts to increase and widen participation in higher education. Already, the Prime Minister and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have set up a National Council for Educational Excellence to advise how to develop a world-class education system in England for children and young people up to the age of 19 and explore how to link industry, higher education and the voluntary sector more closely to headteachers, teachers and parents. The government has also initiated the new 14-19 curriculum reforms including the new diplomas, which will begin in September 2008. At their heart, the diplomas offer the potential to become a radical alternative to the existing curriculum, and they have been made absolutely central to the reforms of the DCSF. In recognition of this potential the 1994 Group is currently engaged in a joint project with the DCSF to assess the impact of the 14-19 reforms on its member institutions to ensure that students who have taken the new diploma qualifications are able to be welcomed onto degree courses at the full range of universities. The Group will soon be publishing the outcome of this research project, and it intends that outcomes will lead to more engagement from the HE sector in this essential activity.

#### **5) Student-focused resources**

There is a clear link between levels and quality of support, facilities and resources on offer to students and the levels of satisfaction students have with their experience at university. Enhancing the student experience depends very much on universities understanding the needs of students in relation to the services, support and facilities they can offer, and formulating strategies in relation to these student-focused resources. Discussions between the 1994 Group and Unions94 have highlighted improvements to a university's physical infrastructure as a key area in which to enhance the student experience. Long-term efforts should continue to be made across the sector to make physical infrastructure more student friendly. Student-facing services and facilities should be joined-up and accessible, ideally being housed under one roof or in one area as part of student-focused 'one-stop shops'.

#### **6) International strategy and internationalisation**

The UK currently has a world-leading position in the education of international students. However, there are clear challenges to this position from established markets in the US, aggressive markets in Australia and in Europe where degrees are now being widely taught in English, and the huge investment in the HE system in China and India which has reduced the number of students from those countries studying overseas. If the UK is to maintain and develop its world-leading position, significant steps will need to be taken. A joined up approach is needed to confront this problem which will involve the sector, government, devolved governments, the British Council, funding agencies and other sector stakeholders. The Group is committed to take forward the development of an international education summit at

which these issues can be debated and action agreed. There is a clear need for more availability of up to date information regarding international student admissions and experiences, in order to keep ahead of international trends which may threaten the UK system in the longer-term.

#### **7) Excellence and enhancement in teaching and learning**

It is important that the learning of students is enriched by the high-quality research around them in the academic community, and that their learning takes place within a truly international context. It is important for universities to keep ahead of student expectations in regards to the teaching and learning they provide, and it is vital to maximise the potential brought by technological advances in their teaching and learning techniques. The NSS and other student surveys are a key way of gathering feedback from students so the sector can move forward. Students know how they want to be taught and have ideas about how techniques can be improved. They play an important role as 'change agents', challenging the established modes of teaching and learning, and contributing to making it more exciting and relevant for themselves and future generations of students. Universities should increasingly look to provide innovative and well facilitated learning space to provide an engaging academic experience, and must greet the challenge of reaching the best balance of physical and electronic resources they provide to their students.

### **Reviewing the Challenges**

As a group we are committed to addressing these challenges and we will be monitoring their impact as we as a sector take them forward. As part of this process we will undertake a similar review in five years time which will set out a view of the student experience in 2012. This will determine the impact of the recommendations we have made in the current report and will set out a further report on student demands for the following five years.

# 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 'Student Experience' is a wide-ranging term meaning different things to different kinds of students. An 18-year-old undergraduate or foundation degree student, living away from parents for the first time, discovering independence, has a very different experience of university to a 40-year-old masters student, living at home with partner and children, balancing a full-time job with part-time study. In turn, both encounter a vastly different experience to that of a student from China, who is getting to know a new language and culture as well as new learning material. Furthermore, there are many different aspects of university life which affect the experience of students, from the quality of teaching, level of academic support and provision of learning and library space to the opportunities for volunteering, sport and other extra-curricular activities, work-based learning and paid work and access to bars, cafes and other social spaces.
- 1.2 In short there are many different student 'experiences' to be found across the spectrum of higher education and even across the same campus. This variation is further increased by the different systems for funding and support found in the UK. Importantly, the school-leaver, the mature student, the international and all other types of student have varying expectations of the experience they hope to receive. In an era of widening participation, varying fee and support structures, rapid globalisation, international competition and technological change, the experiences and expectations of students are changing continuously.
- 1.3 The challenge for universities is to keep abreast of the shifting expectations of an increasingly diverse and informed student population and to adjust accordingly to provide the best possible experience to each of them. This is a challenge not only for universities but also for policy-makers and all student-facing groups across the sector if UK HE is to continue to be one of the leading higher education providers in the world. In response to the changing environment of student experiences and expectations, 1994 Group institutions are redefining the roles of students and setting themselves up to give the best support possible as they live out these various roles at university. In summary, the roles of the modern student include: Learner, Citizen, Colleague, Consumer, Scholar, Ambassador; but perhaps the most important role of all is Partner.
- 1.4 In recognition of this need for focus on the student experience, the 1994 Group initiated its 'Enhancing the Student Experience' project in Summer 2006. This project investigates the key developments regarding aspects of the student experience, drawing on outcomes of the recent increase in information on this issue, and identifies the challenges faced by the sector if we are to meet student expectations. This report recommends to the sector, funding councils, government and stakeholder bodies the areas of research and activity in which we should engage in order to understand more fully and enhance the student experience.
- 1.5 It has been a key objective throughout this project to engage with as many stakeholders as possible in order to broaden the debate, to test conclusions, and to identify work to be taken forward in partnership. A primary focus has been to discuss the issues and challenges directly with students and their representatives, an extremely important approach which has perhaps not been used enough by the sector during this essential debate. The National Union of Students (NUS) has been engaged from an early stage in this project, and has contributed greatly to shaping the report and identifying areas of research and activity on which to work in partnership in the future. In July 2007, the 1994 Group organised a conference at

which students' union staff and officers from across the Group, along with NUS representatives, came together to debate the issues and challenges relating to the student experience, to consider outcomes from the Unions94 Survey 2007, to strengthen their networks and to share best practice. The development of a network of partners across the sector, with institutions, students' unions and the NUS at its heart, is essential for meeting the challenges of the future.

- 1.6 Furthermore, the Group has also engaged with a wide variety of key stakeholders from across the sector to discuss the student experience and the 'Enhancement' project. The Group has been engaged in discussion throughout the project with organisations such as the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, the Higher Education Policy Institute, and the Higher Education Academy. Also, in June 2007, the Group brought together for the first time stakeholder groups including government departments, funding councils, policy-makers, business and a range of other HE organisations to debate the core issues emerging from our research and to shape the final conclusions of the report.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.7 Contributing to the research in this report are the results of a unique survey funded by the 1994 Group and carried out by Unions94 (the collection of students' unions from across the 1994 Group), which has been undertaking research into 1994 Group students' unions in comparison to the sector as a whole. The Unions94 Survey 2007 has proved extremely useful in helping to demonstrate the distinctive student experience to be found at 1994 Group institutions. The top-level findings of this survey, provided by Nick Berg (General Manager, ULU) and Jon Berg (General Manager, Teesside and Treasurer, AMSU), are included in Section 4, below.

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<sup>5</sup> Stakeholder Group's attending the seminar were: Association for Managers of Student Services in Higher Education; Association of Graduate Recruiters; Department for Children, Schools and Families; Girls Schools Association; Higher Education Academy; Ipsos MORI; National Union of Students; Neil Stewarts Associates; Office for Fair Access; Opinion Panel; Quality Assurance Agency; Specialist Schools and Academies Trust; Student Loans Company; UCAS; Universities and Colleges Union

## 2. A Snapshot of the Student Experience in 2007

2.1 In its research the Group has sought to understand the complex factors which affect the experience of all types of students in UK Higher Education; to identify the principal challenges faced by the sector if we are to continue to meet student expectations and enhance their experience in the coming years. As noted above, the student experience is such a wide-ranging term, influenced by such a complex variety of factors that it is fruitless to attempt to define it as a single 'thing'. In light of this, a more useful approach to understanding the student experience is to take a 'snapshot', a current view of the various factors affecting students, which draws together recent research and developments, and identifies the challenges for the sector to address. The following factors make up the 1994 Group's snapshot of the student experience in 2007.

- ***Why should we prioritise student experience?***

2.2 Higher Education has been undergoing significant changes over the past decade, and no group has been affected more by these changes than students. With the growth since the 1980s of the UK HE marketplace, enhanced in recent years by changes to the full-time undergraduate fee system in England, students are becoming more conscious of the quality of experience they receive. Growing importance is placed on good provision of services by institutions and on high standards of customer care, with an increasing emphasis in the media on students as "consumers". It is important for universities to move away from this image, emphasising the importance of higher education as a key stage of development, as it is regarded in the US, for example, and emphasising that the relationship between student and university is one of partnership, a two-way contribution to develop and enhance a person's knowledge and skills and prepare them to become important contributors to society.

- ***The student demographic:***

2.3 The spectrum of student experiences is a complex picture, and so throughout the discussion it is important to be mindful of the various sections of the diversifying student demographic. The image of the 'traditional' student of twenty years ago is no longer applicable, as participation continues to widen and increase. Of the UK's 2.1 million students, the majority are women (56%), the majority are 'mature' students (54% over 21 upon enrolment), 15% are from ethnic minorities and 6% have a registered disability.<sup>6</sup> Also, over 40% per cent of all HE students in the UK study in part-time mode, a significant element in the continuing growth of the sector, and a group which plays a central role in extending higher-level skills, widening participation, and lifelong learning.<sup>7</sup>

2.4 Furthermore, the number of international students in the UK continues to rise. A 2007 UUK survey showed that 70% of institutions saw an overall increase in international student enrolments and 64% reported an increase in EU student enrolments in the year 2006/07.<sup>8</sup> The roles and positions of UK universities are

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<sup>6</sup> 'Admissions to Higher Education: Advisor's Directory,' Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, 2006. Data source: THES.

<sup>7</sup> UUK Policy Briefing, 'Part time students in higher education – supporting higher-level skills and lifelong-learning,' Oct 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See UUK press release, 26 March 2007: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/mediareleases>

becoming increasingly placed within an international context. Both international and domestic students benefit from a cosmopolitan experience on campus and one in which a truly international context is integrated within all aspects of the teaching, learning and research that happens at university.

- ***The student journey:***

2.5 It is also important for universities and other HE organisations to recognise the varying needs and expectations of different students at the key stages of their student journey. A student's experience of university does not begin at the moment they step onto campus at the beginning of October, and it does not end when they are shaking the hand of the Vice-Chancellor at graduation. The early relationship between student and university is important during the applications and admissions process, in preparing students for university life, and to initiate their engagement with and attitudes towards their university in the best way possible. A student's experience of university can stretch back even further through effective HE engagement with schools and colleges. Similarly, alumni of many years could be said to be experiencing their university in later life, through their knowledge and skills acquired at university and through the enhanced reputation that their university has attributed to them. Strong relationships are important between university and alumni, both parties benefiting from a continued mutual association.

2.6 Specific stages of early university life such as the open day, the welcome week and the first lecture are vital stages in the development of this relationship. From an HE Academy survey examining the experience of first year students in HE, it appears 41% of students who knew little or nothing about their course before enrolment had thought of withdrawing, compared with 25% of those who knew a moderate amount or a lot, strongly suggesting that the more students know about their institutions and courses before enrolling, the less likely they are to consider dropping out.<sup>9</sup> A solid engagement of higher education institutions with schools and colleges is extremely important in understanding the needs and expectations of the HE students of the future. This is particularly the case in regards to understanding young people's expectations in relation to learning resources, teaching methods and developments in IT and equipment. Of course, strong links between schools and HE also play an enormous part in Widening Participation.

- ***The growth of the marketplace and the impact of fees:***

2.7 International and postgraduate students across the UK have been paying tuition fees since the 1980s, and this was the real beginning of the HE student marketplace. Across the UK, international student fees are not capped, and universities have the power to set fees as they like. Despite this, demand for UK HE from international students continues to rise,<sup>10</sup> and these students make an extremely important contribution to the sustainability of many parts of the sector. Similarly, postgraduate fees are uncapped but demand for these programmes is increasing at a rate faster than for undergraduate courses across the UK, and this is particularly the case for postgraduate taught programmes (PGT)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'The First Year Experience Survey', HEA 2006. See: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/FYEsurvey.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Full time international students in UK rose from 95,900 in 1992 to 240,390 in 2004-05. 'The Economic Costs and Benefits of International Students', Vickers & Bekhradnia, HEPI, July 2007, p2

<sup>11</sup> UK postgraduate student numbers (FTE) rose from 254,671 in 2000/01 to 309,478 in 2005/06, a growth of 9.7%, compared to a 6.6% growth in undergraduate student numbers (FTE). This trend was particularly marked in PGT student numbers, which grew 11.3%. HESA, Planning Plus 2007.



2.8 Undergraduate tuition fees were introduced across the UK in 1997, and since then this has become a rather complex picture. Since September 2006, universities and colleges in England have been able to charge new full time home undergraduate students a variable fee, capped for 2008 entry at £3,145 a year. This is paid upfront by the Government with students repaying the fee loan after graduation, when they are earning £15,000 per annum. Similarly, from 2007/08, institutions in Wales and Northern Ireland have been able to charge the same variable fee as pioneered in England. If this appears to be aligning the various UK systems, the complexity of the UK marketplace is retained by Scotland's undergraduate system. In 2001, the Scottish Parliament chose to abolish the initial UK upfront tuition fee and instead implement a graduate endowment. This itself has recently been abolished, announced in November 2007, and now students already living in Scotland will pay no tuition fees for full-time undergraduate courses, and those coming from elsewhere in the UK to study in Scotland pay an annual fee of £1,735 or, for a medical course, a fee of £2,760.

2.9 Despite the wide variety of fees system, participation in UK HE continues to increase. We are only beginning to see the implications of the new variable fee system in England, but so far the signs have been encouraging. Following fears that the new system would reduce participation and drive students to apply to other HE systems, a view which seemed to be compounded by a drop in applications in England during the 2006 entry cycle, the most recent evidence is that applications have risen significantly once again, resuming the trend over the past decade of unprecedented increase in HE participation. After the decision to introduce variable fees, as might be expected of a policy change with significant financial implications for individuals, levels of applications in 2005 and 2006 were significantly distorted. In 2005 there was an above trend increase in applications where some applicants brought forward their applications, following which the level of applications fell modestly for the 2006 entry.<sup>12</sup> However, a snapshot of data taken by UCAS on 30 June 2007, shows that the number of people applying to full-time undergraduate courses at UK universities and colleges in 2007 increased by 5.3% as compared to the same point in 2006. This increase was particularly marked in England, where there was an increase of 6.3%.<sup>13</sup>

▪ **Grants and bursaries:**

2.10 As the implications of the new systems unfold, there is no doubt that their long-term success depends greatly on the successful implementation of grants and bursary schemes. Never have the issues of Widening Participation and Access been higher on the HE agenda, and all HEIs are showing unprecedented levels of commitment to these issues. A condition for institutions charging variable fees has been to sign up to an Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). This agreement sets out the universities proposals for improving access and the action they take to promote fair access, including providing financial help, so that students from all backgrounds are encouraged to apply. Information on fees, bursaries and grants across the UK becomes more accessible with each applications cycle and importantly, via the UCAS website, students and their parents can compare the funding available for different courses, universities and countries within the UK marketplace.

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<sup>12</sup> For further analysis, see Ramsden and Brown, 'Variable tuition fees in England: assessing the impact on students and higher education institutions. A first report.' UUK, 16 Feb 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See UCAS press release, 19 July 2007: <http://www.ucas.com/new/press/news190707.html>

2.11 Mechanisms of fees systems have not changed at international and postgraduate level, and remain that fees must be paid upfront. To help students with the upfront payment, most public support for postgraduate study runs through Research Councils UK scholarships. Compared to undergraduate courses, there is a larger role played by privately funded grants and bursaries in postgraduate support. There is ongoing debate as to how far the introduction of variable fees will affect PGT programmes, and it will be important to monitor emerging patterns relating to this as variable fees take effect. On the one hand there is the concern that increased fees will discourage students to progress to PGT study, as the level of debt increases. Alternatively, with more students qualified to undergraduate level and with a growing need for students to differentiate themselves in the employment market, this could see a continued rise in demand for PGT programmes. Also, the changing nature of the market may see a shift from more traditional academic PGT programmes to ones of a more vocational nature. The system of postgraduate financial support will need to be monitored as undergraduate variable fees take effect.

• ***Attitudes towards Higher Education: Why Study?***

2.12 So in light of tuition fees, demand for higher education in the UK has continued to rise. Attending university is increasingly viewed by many people as a key stage in their future, an essential stage of knowledge and skills development, an important progression route to employment, and an opportunity to get to know new people and places. The large majority of students have positive feelings about university, in terms of the knowledge and skills, the social experience, and the employment prospects they expect to gain. The UNITE student experience report, 2006 showed that 46% of students had very favourable impressions of university, a rise of 14% since 2001, and 44% had fairly favourable impressions. Similarly, 69% strongly agreed that going to university was a worthwhile experience, and another 27% said they tended to agree.<sup>14</sup>

2.13 From a 2006 survey of sixth form students in England, gathering their views on the introduction of variable fees, many prospective students accepted that they would be subject to debt and loans during their university life. Many had optimistic views and were confident that a student loan would work to make their lives more acceptable financially. Also, most felt that the proposed method of loan repayment (retrospectively, once graduate earns £15,000 p.a.) was well considered, appropriate and manageable.<sup>15</sup> However, the financial outlook amongst existing students in the UK was notably more pessimistic. Asked in the UNITE student experience report what they considered to be the worst aspects of university life, 48% of those surveyed said it was having little money or no income, while 39% pointed to the debt that they were accumulating.<sup>16</sup> On average UK students can expect to owe over £11,000 by the time they finish university.<sup>17</sup>

2.14 There is, however, evidence to suggest that the economic benefits of a degree are substantial, and that graduates will on average earn more over their careers than people who did not go on to university. A 2007 UUK and PricewaterhouseCoopers report shows that there are significant economic benefits to obtaining a degree, and these amount to an additional £160,000 over a working lifetime compared with an

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<sup>14</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>15</sup> 'Changing Fee Regimes and their Impact on Student Attitudes to Higher Education,' The Knowledge Partnership and the University of Southampton, June 2006.

<sup>16</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>17</sup> 'Admissions to Higher Education', Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, 2006. Data source: THES.

individual with two or more A-levels, representing a difference of up to 25% between the two groups. The evidence also suggests that obtaining a postgraduate qualification brings additional financial benefits. It is important to note however, that economic benefits of a degree can vary significantly depending on the programme of study. The report suggests that, while a medicine graduate could expect to receive £340k gross additional lifetime earnings compared to people with two or more A-levels, this is around ten times more than the additional lifetime earnings expected by arts graduates, which is closer to £35k.<sup>18</sup>

- 2.15 Another important conclusion of the research is that it suggests that there has been no erosion of the financial benefits of a degree even though there has been a substantial increase in the supply of graduates over the last 15 years. The report shows that there has been a matching increase in demand in the economy for highly trained individuals, and concludes that in Britain's knowledge-based economy there is every prospect that this demand will continue to grow in the future. In addition, an encouraging outcome of the Leitch Review of Skills is that despite the rising number of graduates in the UK, the wage returns associated with a degree have remained relatively stable, suggesting that employers do not see the value of a degree as being diminished.<sup>19</sup>

- ***Where to Study?***

- 2.16 Regarding the choice of where to study, current students reflect that the major factors in their decision are the university's overall and academic reputation.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, prospective students feel that the perceived benefits of studying at a more prestigious university would outweigh other factors, and many would not be deterred by raised fee levels for the prospect of studying at highly regarded universities.<sup>21</sup> Also, the social experience is one of the most important factors, particularly for undergraduates, as to whether to go to university, and where in particular they choose to study. 35% of existing students said a town or city's reputation for social life was the most important factor behind the decision of where to study, and 23% gave the particular university's reputation for social life.<sup>22</sup>

- 2.17 A survey of English institutions showed that some believed an effect of variable fees would be a rise in local participation in HE, as students chose to live at home whilst studying, in order to reduce living costs. Of the existing students surveyed in 2005 who were living at home, 62% said that they were doing so in order to save money and to cut the cost of going to university. This seems to suggest that the regionalisation of HE may be likely to accelerate as a result of variable fees.

- ***Employability and skills:***

- 2.18 As the sector becomes more competitive the issue of employability is rising in importance. Following the outcomes and recommendations of the Leitch Review of Skills<sup>23</sup>, and more recently Lord Sainsbury's Review of Government's Science and Innovation Policies, skills and employability of graduates are rising issues on the

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<sup>18</sup> 'The economic benefits of a degree', UUK & PricewaterhouseCoopers, Feb 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See 'The Leitch Review of Skills', final report available at:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews/leitch\\_review/review\\_leitch\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm)

<sup>20</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>21</sup> 'Changing Fee Regimes', The Knowledge Partnership

<sup>22</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>23</sup> See 'The Leitch Review of Skills', final report available at:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent\\_reviews/leitch\\_review/review\\_leitch\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm)

national agenda. The Sainsbury Review draws attention to the 'major need to improve the level of career advice given to young people,' and calls for HEFCE to produce an annual report 'detailing the number of students graduating in particular subjects, how easily graduates get jobs in particular areas, and in what areas industry foresees shortages of graduates arising.'<sup>24</sup> This is an important recommendation which would be of much help to students, universities and government alike, as would an extension of the time period for tracking graduates in the HESA and DIUS Destination of Leavers Survey, which in the past had been set at just six months, but has recently been piloted at three and a half years.<sup>25</sup> Extending this time period is welcome as conducting the survey six months after graduation has not tended to produce a sufficient reflection of longer-term employment prospects, whether due to graduates choosing to travel, engage in further study or in other activities before settling into the world of work.

- 2.19 Most students in 2005, before fees, cited the enhancement of employment prospects as the main reason they applied to university. 70% chose to go to university in order to gain qualifications, while 52% said that the chances of getting a good or better job influenced their decision.<sup>26</sup> It can reasonably be assumed that issues of graduate level employment have become more important to students following the introduction of variable fees, as will university league tables as they select those courses and institutions likely to deliver greater benefits to them.
- 2.20 The job market for degree holders is becoming increasingly competitive. Almost six out of ten students will graduate with either a first or upper-second class honours degree, which is having significant implications on how employers recruit. A degree, though an essential prerequisite for many careers, is no longer a distinguishing factor in many cases, and there is a growing emphasis on the need for wider employability skills. Evidence suggests that employers are increasingly looking for people with generic employability skills such as team working and problem solving, good communications skills and creative minds.<sup>27</sup> Students are showing an appreciation of the importance of these skills. When asked their views on the main skills and attributes they felt they would accumulate at university, amongst the highest rated were the ability to work under pressure, presentation skills, report writing skills and IT skills.<sup>28</sup> For universities to stay abreast of this, it is important to give a business context to the skills acquired by students in their university life, and to help them recognise the transferable skills they are acquiring.
- 2.21 Clearly, a student's level of employability depends not only on their academic ability, but their ability to demonstrate life skills and a mature attitude to work. Experience of working or volunteering is of great value, and there is evidence to suggest that the level of student employment whilst at university is rising. Responding to the growing need for graduates to differentiate themselves through their additional activities, universities are increasingly accrediting such extra-curricular activity and volunteering, including several 1994 Group institutions (see Section 4). However, while this activity and part-time employment is in many ways preparing students with extra skills for future jobs, there is also evidence that work and study are needing to be finely balanced in order to relieve the growing financial pressures upon them. While many are able to strike the right balance between the two activities, there is

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<sup>24</sup> 'The Race to the Top: A Review of Government's Science and Innovation Policies', Lord Sainsbury of Turville, October 2007, pp6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p113

<sup>26</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>27</sup> See UUK report, 'Higher level learning: Universities and employers working together.'

<sup>28</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

also worrying evidence that suggests employment can encroach on the focus and quality of a student's academic work.

- **Student employment and academic workload**

2.22 A 2006 report, 'All Work and Low Pay: The growth in UK student employment', published by the NUS and the TUC examines the trends of student employment and the problems that students face in balancing work and study through their university life.<sup>29</sup> Figures show that student employment rose by over 50% between 1996 and 2006. Of those in employment, 40% work in retail and earn an average hourly wage of £6.20 (male) and £5.98 (female); and 21% work in hospitality with an average hourly wage of £5.70 (male) and £5.51 (female). On average, students in employment work 14 hours per week, but 1 in 5 work over 20 hours per week.<sup>30</sup>

2.23 Worryingly, the rise in the need to balance work and study seems to be impacting on the learning experience. The report shows that around 40% of students in employment felt that it impacted on their studies. Of these, 75% said that they had less time for reading and studying, around two thirds said it impacted on the quality of their work, and around two thirds also said that they experienced increased stress levels and felt overloaded. Most worrying of all was that a quarter said they had missed lectures or classes due to work commitments.<sup>31</sup> A similar feeling was gathered from UK students surveyed in the UNITE student experience report. Of the 1,025 surveyed in 2005/06, 41% were currently in employment, and over half of these gave the need to work while studying as one of the worst aspects of university life. Moreover, 41% of those in employment felt that term-time work had an adverse effect on their studies. The report also suggests that 71% of students in employment in 2005/06 worked to earn money for 'basic essentials'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, of the first year students surveyed by the HEA, while on the whole most students seemed to be coping with their academic workloads, a third of respondents found academic work harder than they had expected it to be, and 38% found difficulty in balancing academic and other commitments. More than half the students who said they were having difficulty in coping with the demands of HE also said that they had considered withdrawing.<sup>33</sup>

- **International Value Comparators**

2.24 A 2007 study by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) demonstrated that international students make a very significant contribution to the UK higher education market and indeed the wider economy.<sup>34</sup> International students are clearly important to the UK, which currently holds a strong position in the global market. However, there are clear challenges to this position from established markets in the US, aggressive markets in Australia and in Europe, where degrees are now being widely taught in English, and the huge investment in the HE system in China and India which has reduced the number of students from those countries studying overseas. There is a clear need for more availability of up to date information regarding

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<sup>29</sup> 'All Work and Low Pay: The growth in UK student employment', TUC & NUS, 2006. See: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/allworklowpay.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Figures are taken from the DFES report: 'Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2004/2005', Institute of Employment Studies / National Centre for Social Research, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> 'All Work and Low Pay', TUC & NUS, 2006

<sup>32</sup> 'The UNITE Student Experience Report, 2006', Ipsos MORI

<sup>33</sup> 'The First Year Experience Survey', HEA 2006.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Economic Costs and Benefits of International Students', Vickers & Bekhradnia, HEPI, July 2007

international student admissions and experiences, in order to keep ahead of international trends which may threaten the UK system in the longer-term.

2.25 Other 2007 HEPI studies have investigated the amount of time students in England devote to their studies, taking into account the time spent in classes and their personal study time, and an important conclusion of these surveys is a demonstration of international comparators to the English system. For example, it seems, from the HEPI surveys and others such as the Eurostudent survey, that English students put in significantly fewer hours of study, on average just over 25 hours per week, than their European counterparts, most of whom study for over 30 hours and some stretch to 35 and even 40 hours per week.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, English degrees are also on the whole much shorter than in most European nations. On average, first degrees in England are just over three years in length, compared to an average of almost seven years in Germany and Austria.

2.26 The HEPI report notes that the figures do not take into account variations in term or semester lengths, they do not give any indication of the quality of education received, and also that it is commonly held that students entering university with A levels have a deeper level of knowledge in their chosen subjects than their European counterparts. However, a potentially serious conclusion of the report is that these findings will impact on the way the value of UK HE is perceived internationally:

‘Although there is no suggestion...that the length of study equates to quality of learning, as these comparisons become better known there is bound to be increasing pressure on English universities to explain how their shorter, less intensive, courses match those elsewhere in Europe.’<sup>36</sup>

2.27 The HEPI survey goes on to suggest that non-EU students, who pay the highest fees of all, are showing dissatisfaction with the value of their education in England, 27 per cent reporting poor or very poor value for money. These findings, the report notes, combined ‘with the fact that fees in this country are so much higher than in most other countries, make our international student market vulnerable.’<sup>37</sup>

- ***Changing roles in higher education and the student voice***

2.28 The changing environment of fees and expectations has brought the nature of the relationship between student and university into focus, including an increasing emphasis on the idea of students as consumers. Directly compounding these anticipations were the responses of sixth form students, as to what they expected in return for increased tuition fees. In their eyes, raised fees should equal better student services, accommodation, ICT facilities, exchange programmes and (occasionally) employing better staff.<sup>38</sup>

2.29 As the marketplace develops, there is certainly a growing need to encourage and consider the ‘student voice’. This has been recognised in government by the appointment of Lord Triesman as the first Minister for Students in October 2007, and the formation of an independent National Student Forum which will advise ministers on student issues. There is a growing importance for universities to listen to the opinions of students through forums and surveys, and acknowledge their role as

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<sup>35</sup> ‘The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities: 2007 Report’, Sastry & Bekhradnia, HEPI, September 2007. Report Summary, pp4-5

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p6

<sup>38</sup> ‘Changing Fee Regimes’, The Knowledge Partnership

'change agents' when updating approaches to teaching and learning, student support services and any other aspects which affect their experience of university.

- 2.30 Importantly, the increasing emphasis on students as consumers must be tempered with the recognition of students' and universities' roles as mutual partners in the development of people's knowledge, skills and experience, in order to shape their contribution to society. The new relationship places an increased responsibility on institutions to work in close partnership with the NUS in recognition of its role as the national voice of students, as well as with local students' unions in their role as the voice of students on campus and providers of many aspects of the non-academic student experience.

- ***The need for wider data around the student experience***

- 2.31 In recent years there has been increasing availability of information relating to the student experience and a rising level of research into this area. However, our research has revealed that this has clearly not gone far enough and there are gaps to be filled. A wider availability of data relating to the student experience is required alongside a bank of high-level institutional data which will better inform the decisions of prospective students, allowing them to differentiate between various types of institutions in an increasingly diverse sector.

- 2.32 The National Student Survey is one of the few national indicators directly focused on assessing the student experience. The most positive outcome of the NSS has been that it has enabled institutions to highlight areas which need attention and to focus efforts on directly enhancing aspects of the student experience in order to improve satisfaction scores. While the NSS provides a useful starting point, there is a growing need across the sector for a wider availability of data around the student experience. Very useful privately-run surveys exist, such as the I-Graduate survey which aims at understanding the expectations and satisfaction of international students in the UK. However, there is a need for more public information, such as a national survey of postgraduate student experience, in order both to better inform the decisions of students, and also to help HEIs identify problem areas and work to enhance particular aspects of the student experience.

- ***Funding the student experience***

- 2.33 Investment in UK HE is relatively low by international standards.<sup>39</sup> Many universities in the sector are struggling with a gap between teaching funding allocations and the real cost of teaching, and variable tuition fees cover only part of this gap. Throughout the discussion around the student experience, and while recognising the strong commitment to enhance the student experience that exists at universities, it must be recognised that this commitment comes at a cost both in terms of management time and in the provision of improved services and facilities. It must be recognised that this commitment places an ever increasing strain on universities' limited resources.

- 2.34 Recent and ongoing efforts are being made to enhance the UK HE's system of fundraising and voluntary giving, as this is seen as a key future avenue for enhancing university funding, and there are visions of raising the UK's profile in this area to the level of the US system. However, while a minority of UK universities have excellent systems in place to raise money from such sources, for the rest of the sector this will

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<sup>39</sup> The UK spends 1.1% of GDP on HE, compared to 2.9% in the US. UUK, submission of evidence to the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 'The future sustainability of the higher education sector: international aspects,' July 2007.

be a gradual process, and the current financial strain on institutions will remain in the short-to-medium term.

2.35 Despite this, there is strong commitment from institutions across the sector, and a determination from those within the 1994 Group, to do their best to enhance the student experience through investment in members of faculty and in services and facilities for all students.

▪ ***Reviewing the student experience in 2007***

2.36 The good news is that students continue to be excited and engaged by higher education and continue to see it as an important stage in their own development. Despite variable fees applications to HE have continued to rise and many recent student surveys have indicated that students are satisfied and engaged with their university life. English institutions, in receipt of variable tuition fees, have launched ambitious investment plans designed to meet the increased expectations of students. This has included enhancing faculty numbers, teaching resources and student accommodation. Institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have yet to receive the financial investment from fees, have likewise been under increased pressure to improve faculty numbers and physical infrastructure and have responded accordingly. The move to a regulated student marketplace has been a success.

2.37 However, students find themselves in a swiftly changing environment and the future of higher education contains some large challenges for them and indeed for universities. Institutional investment in student support, scholarships and bursaries to widen participation and to attract the very best students from all backgrounds, places increased expectations on institutions to perform within this new market environment. Universities must also demonstrate continued and strengthened commitment to providing excellent teaching, support and facilities in order to ensure that the experience of university life continues to be as appealing to students as it has been in the past decade. They must achieve this within a relatively constrained funding environment. Furthermore, these funding constraints vary across the UK, with the devolved systems facing similar expectations from students as in England but receiving different levels of resource to meet them.

2.38 The UK marketplace can be a complex picture, and there is growing need for universities or groups of universities to define their position and clarify their offer to students. There is also a need for raising the issue of student experience and the factors which affect it to the top of the higher education agenda, if the UK is to meet emerging challenges and continue to be a world-leading provider of higher education.



### 3. 1994 Group: Leading the Student Experience Debate

3.1 The UK marketplace is a complex picture, and there is growing need for universities or groups of universities to define their position and clarify their ‘offer’ to students. There is also a need for raising the issue of student experience and the factors which affect it to the top of the higher education agenda, if the UK is to meet emerging challenges and continue to be a world-leading provider of higher education. Senior Management Teams at 1994 Group institutions focus a great deal of attention on the student experience and collectively the Group is a leader of this debate.

▪ **Understanding the 1994 Group experience: Introduction**

3.2 There is a general and growing agreement that a distinctive 1994 Group student experience exists. There is a perceivable flavour to 1994 Group institutions and a shared ethos behind their approach to student experience. Across the Group there is evidence of excellent provision and support for students relating to both academic and non-academic aspects of their university life. Furthermore, there is evidence of very high levels of satisfaction amongst the students themselves.

3.3 The NSS has strongly suggested that the model offered by 1994 Group institutions is greatly appreciated by students. Taking an average of the past three years’ results, we can see that, of the top six mainstream universities, five are 1994 Group institutions (see Fig. 1), and in addition there are ten Group members in the top twenty.<sup>40</sup>

**Fig. 1: NSS top six (from 3 year average 2005 – 2007)**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Institution	Teaching	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Organisation and management	Learning Resources	Personal development	Average Score (Columns B-G)	Overall satisfaction	
1. <b>St Andrews</b>	88	77	83	86	75	84	82	89	
2. Oxford	88	76	84	80	94	84	84	88	
3. <b>Leicester</b>	85	75	81	82	84	83	82	87	
4. <b>Birkbeck</b>	86	76	77	79	77	80	79	86	
5. <b>Loughborough</b>	83	75	82	85	87	83	82	85	
6. <b>East Anglia</b>	84	74	80	81	85	83	81	85	

3.4 On average, the 1994 Group clearly remains the highest performer in this survey, when compared to other mission groups and to the sector as a whole (see Fig. 2)

**Fig. 2: NSS results (3 year average 2005-2007)**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Group	Teaching	Assessment and feedback	Academic support	Organisation and management	Learning Resources	Personal development	Average Score (Columns B-G)	Overall satisfaction	
<b>1994 Group</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>71.3</b>	<b>77.4</b>	<b>79.3</b>	80.0	80.1	<b>78.4</b>	<b>82.9</b>	
Sector	79.9	70.5	75.6	75.0	79.9	80.1	76.9	80.1	

3.5 Overall, the results of the NSS support the Group’s Mission Statement, reflecting the commitment of its members to provide high quality teaching and demonstrating that

<sup>40</sup> Results are a percentage score taken from a five-point scale. NSS results at Unistats website: <http://www.unistats.com/>

the student experience is central to the Group's aims. The survey is undoubtedly a very useful indicator for demonstrating the Group's delivery of an excellent student experience. Furthermore, the Group's average results have continued to improve, building on its outstanding results for the past two years. Also, the results improved more in 2007 than between 2005 and 2006. Also worthy of note is that, although there has been improvement in many institutions, the overall rankings of institutions have remained largely similar in each year's results, and, as the cohort is completely different each year, this suggests that the NSS is producing accurate outcomes, and should continue to do so in the years ahead.<sup>41</sup>

- 3.6 Outcomes of the Group's performance in the NSS are supported by evidence from institutions' surveys of postgraduate student satisfaction and outcomes of the I-Graduate survey of international students' experiences, which covers postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students, as well as undergraduates. International students at 1994 Group institutions show high satisfaction in comparison to the sector, particularly in areas relating to student support ranging from assistance with finances and accommodation upon arrival, the support of careers services and graduate schools, the provision of faith and worship facilities, and the activities of the students' union (see Figure 3).<sup>42</sup>

**Fig. 3: 1994 Group compared to the International Student Barometer, Autumn 2006**

Selected Categories	% Satisfied		
	1994	ISB %	ISB +/-
Accommodation Office (on arrival)	75.9%	70.8%	5.1%
Careers Service	82.4%	78.5%	3.9%
Safety	88.8%	85.9%	2.9%
Finance Office (on arrival)	73.4%	70.7%	2.8%
International Office	87.6%	85.1%	2.5%
Counselling	86.4%	84.3%	2.1%
Faith Provision	83.8%	82.2%	1.7%
Students' Union	83.8%	82.1%	1.7%
Graduate School	87.7%	87.1%	0.6%
<b>All Categories</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>76.8%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>

- 3.7 In order to better understand what may be behind these good satisfaction ratings, the 1994 Group has conducted its own research in the form of the Unions94 Survey 2007, a unique research project funded by the 1994 Group and conducted by Unions94 (the collection of students' union staff and officers from across the 1994 Group). The results of the Unions94 Survey 2007 provided for the first time a rich and detailed picture of the fundamentally important role that the non-academic aspects of the student experience play in our institutions. The survey suggests that there is an interesting relationship between student engagement in non-academic activity, the provision of high quality teaching and the excellence of the student

<sup>41</sup> NSS results at Unistats website: <http://www.unistats.com/>

<sup>42</sup> The "1994" Group results are averages of all responses from the 10 1994 Group institutions in the ISB Autumn Wave 2006. The "ISB" Group results are averages of all responses from the full 42 ISB institutions in the ISB Autumn Wave 2006. Data provided by I-Graduate: <http://www.i-graduate.org/>

experience. This survey looked at 1994 Group students' unions in comparison to the sector as a whole, and outcomes tend to strengthen the hypothesis that there is a distinctive and desirable student experience at 1994 Group universities. Findings are noted in more detail throughout this section, but a few of the headline findings suggest that on average 1994 Group students' unions have a higher level of engagement in extra-curricular activity, a higher electoral turn-out and more participation in democratic processes, more sabbatical officers, and higher levels of volunteering than the sector as a whole.

▪ **Understanding the 1994 Group experience: Outcomes**

3.8 The Group's position of leadership in the student experience debate is based upon each member's delivery of a distinctive and desirable student experience, which prepares students extremely well for their future and towards making a significant contribution to society. The Group's strong position in this area is based on our members' collective commitment to the following key areas.

- A.) A Shared Community Ethos
- B.) Production of Exceptionally Employable Graduates
- C.) Partnership of Learners
- D.) Joined-Up Student Journey

**A.) A SHARED COMMUNITY ETHOS**

A.1 There is a shared sense of community at 1994 Group institutions, to which a number of factors contribute:

• ***Institution size:***

A.2 1994 Group universities are generally small- to medium-sized institutions. The average 1994 Group institution has just over 10,000 students.<sup>43</sup> As 1994 Group institutions tend to have more close-knit academic communities, there is a more personal and friendly feel for students. They operate on a personalised scale, maximising the opportunity for student-staff, and student-student contact and encouraging an adaptable and inter-disciplinary approach to both research and teaching. Their scale gives students more opportunity to get to know their tutors, while helping the university to keep track and assist with all elements of a student's development, and even our larger institutions apply the principle through very strong levels of student support.

• ***The campus:***

A.3 The majority of 1994 Group universities are campus-based institutions and all are defined by their physical environment. These purpose-built, self-contained environments give the academic community a more personal feel. 1994 Group institutions are highly residential, with large numbers of students living on campus. With most facilities contained on the same site and within a short distance of halls of residence, students can go conveniently about their university life. The close-knit academic environment provided by a campus ensures that the community is active and caring towards the student population.

A.4 The four 1994 Group member institutions based in central London are clearly faced with physical challenges that are different from the other members, but these

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<sup>43</sup> FTE student numbers. HESA data, 2005/06

institutions retain a strong community ethos, which is often contributed to by creating a distinct campus within the urban environment.

#### **New Student Village at Queen Mary, University of London**

**Queen Mary College's** new Westfield Student Village provides ensuite, self-catering accommodation for nearly 2000 students, in six different styles of building designed to create a village community feel. Its addition - the result of a £36 million investment by the College - has made Queen Mary's Mile End campus the largest self-contained student campus in London and one of the largest in Britain.

The Village development contains a shop, launderette, large common/meeting room, café bar, 200 seat restaurant, central reception and a security office, as well as a wooded courtyard and a large lawn for students to enjoy during the warmer months. Electronic card-access is featured on the main entrances to each building and the security office is staffed 24 hours a day. Twenty-one rooms are specifically designed to cater for the needs of wheel-chair disabled users. Increased interaction around the Village, and the fact that there are a greater number of students permanently on campus, has led to a greater uptake in the number of students involved in clubs and societies, Student Volunteering and other student union programmes.

<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/qmliving/accommodation/>

- **Collegiate structures**

- A.5 Three members of the 1994 Group – Durham, York and Lancaster – have a collegiate structure, giving students the academic and social benefits that are offered from affinity to colleges. The overall community ethos and campus environment, which exist at all 1994 Group institutions, are also strongly present in these collegiate universities.

#### **Investment in college social facilities at Durham**

**Durham University** is spending half a million pounds on improving social facilities for the 2,000 students who attend its Queen's Campus in Stockton. The new £500,000 package of measures includes the creation of dedicated social space at Queen's John Snow and Stephenson Colleges, each being allocated £75,000 to create a unique social hub to better reflect the sense of community and fellowship enjoyed by the students staying in college.

Private office space, an internet café, a juice and coffee bar and dedicated TV lounges are included in the proposals from the colleges, and planned changes include a staged area for live performances, new furnishings and lighting. Providing stimulating, welcoming and vibrant space and facilities for students is at the heart of this investment, which is aimed at providing a campus which not only delivers a world-class learning and research environment, but also a highly-valued pastoral, emotional and social experience.

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/queens-campus/>

- **Student Support Services**

- A.6 There is a clear link between the sense of community on campus and the provision of excellent pastoral, residential and academic support services. This is a key area through which members of the 1994 Group deliver their distinctive approach to the student experience, and an area in which there are many examples of excellence from across the Group, from non-academic, lifestyle support, to engaging academic support.

### Student Counselling at Royal Holloway

**Royal Holloway, University of London** has an established reputation as a centre of excellence for student counselling. The College has long made brief, effective counselling accessible to students without any waiting list. The College was the first UK institution to receive Service Recognition from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) in 2000. Close and effective liaison with the NHS means that when initial assessment shows students have significant mental health issues, the College is able to arrange immediate consultation with NHS mental health professionals.

This service is backed up by a comprehensive web site addressing common mental health issues (<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/counselling>) which has proved so popular that it is now used under license by a large number of other educational institutions in the UK and elsewhere. The College was also closely involved in the development of the Students Against Depression ([www.studentdepression.org](http://www.studentdepression.org)) web site which won the BACP Award for Innovation in 2006.

### One-to-one Tutorials for Academic Writing at SOAS

Since September 2004 PhD students at the **School of Oriental and African Studies** (SOAS) have been giving one-to-one tutorials to undergraduate and masters students covering all aspects of essay and dissertation writing. In the pilot project, seven PhD students, already with some teaching or tutoring experience, undertook an initial tutor training course, including how to provide support and give one-to-one tutorials to students. The students were chosen not only because of their previous experience (which included some students working as Teaching Assistants), but also because they had studied at SOAS from their first Undergraduate degree up until their MPhil and PhD and therefore were very familiar with the School and its systems. It was also felt that from a student's point of view, student tutors could be easier to approach than some members of academic staff.

Tutors received support throughout the year in the form of regular meetings, feedback sessions and additional training sessions. Students receiving the tutorials have found the scheme extremely useful and some have reported an increase in their grades. The pilot was extremely successful and continues to run in its current format and as a new scheme of writing tutorials for MPhil students.

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/centres/centreinfo.cfm?navid=889>

#### ▪ **Management Structure:**

- A.7 The close-knit nature of 1994 Group institutions allows a certain community culture amongst their staff and in their governance. Also, smaller-scale academic departments and support services make it easier to understand specific needs of students, and easier to adapt in order to meet these needs.

### Integrated Staff and Services at St Andrews

Student life can prove a particularly anxious experience for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. However, given the compact profile at the **University of St Andrews**, these students' particular needs are met with a range of support able to be provided because of the closely integrated nature of the staff and services.

To facilitate a smooth transition into student life, the Disability Team will organise several visits for the student and their parents to familiarise themselves with the town and University. If appropriate, a member of the team will visit the student *in situ* to meet with current carers and assess the student in his/her home setting. On arrival in St Andrews, a "buddy" is allocated to assist with attending social events and independent living. Then the student can expect to receive a weekly meeting with a member of the Disability Team, to organise workloads and address concerns. In University residences, staff are given Autism awareness training, and students are provided with the same room for the duration of their studies to provide continuity.

Future concentration is now going into facilitating support at the other end of the experience, enabling a smooth transition to employment or further study.

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/policy/Disabilities/Disabilityequalityscheme/>

## **B.) PRODUCTION OF EXCEPTIONALLY EMPLOYABLE GRADUATES**

- B.1 Through a mix of top-quality academic experience and high level of extra-curricular activity, 1994 Group universities produce very well-rounded and exceptionally employable graduates at all levels, with a wealth of different experiences and life skills which are applicable and desirable in the workplace. 1994 Group institutions believe that there is more to being a student than simply obtaining a qualification, and that there is much more to the role of the university than simply teaching students so they can pass examinations and then leave. The role of the university should largely be to shape and mature individuals and develop their skills and attitudes so that they can leave university ready to contribute to society. 1994 Group students receive these wider employability and life skills, and engage with wider activity which compliments their academic achievements. Importantly, they are given the facilities to recognise the skills that they are acquiring from such activity:

### **Goldsmiths' 3D Graduate**

**Goldsmiths, University of London** is supporting the academic and wider personal development of its students by a new package of on-line resources called 3D Graduate. The initiative is supported by the personal tutoring system, but also links with the careers service, student support services, students' union and other significant aspects of the student experience. Students are provided with on-line opportunities to test and develop their skills, compile a personal development portfolio recording their achievements, link in with volunteering and other activities, access academic and support services and maintain links with careers advisors. The 3D Graduate is designed to help students make the most out of their time at Goldsmiths and to equip them to succeed in their chosen careers when they leave.

<http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/3d/>

- ***Extra-curricular activity: Sport***

- B.2 A high provision of extra-curricular activity exists at 1994 Group universities, and there is a high level of involvement of students in sports and societies across many different areas. Involvement in sports teams, clubs and societies is an ideal way for students to meet people with similar interests, contributes greatly to fitness and general wellbeing and greatly enhances the overall student experience. Furthermore, at 1994 Group universities, students are given the opportunity to really excel in their chosen activity, and sporting avenues also create much opportunity for students to engage with schools and the wider community. The Group has some of the UK's most successful sporting institutions, including Loughborough, Bath, Durham and Exeter and there is a strong sporting culture and reputation across the Group, most members offering very successful sports bursaries to students.

### **Sporting Excellence**

**Loughborough University** is the UK's premier university for sport, bringing together exceptional athletes, facilities, coaching and research expertise, and extensive partnerships with major sports organisations. It has perhaps the best integrated sports development environment in the world, with the country's largest concentration of world-class training facilities across a wide range of sports. It boasts an unparalleled record of sporting excellence, having won the British Universities Sports Association (BUSA) Championship title for very nearly thirty consecutive years. The University's sports scholarship programme, the largest in the UK, enables the finest young athletes to excel in both their academic and sporting achievements.

[http://sdc.lboro.ac.uk/aboutus/?cat\\_id=15&level=1](http://sdc.lboro.ac.uk/aboutus/?cat_id=15&level=1)

The **University of Bath** offers a unique experience for its students in the area of sport and physical activity. It is the only University in the UK to offer free student access to sports facilities, which, combined with world class facilities, support services, coaching, competitive and recreational activities, ensure that all levels of activity are appropriately catered for. It is the only English Institute of Sport which has been awarded 'Inclusive Fitness Initiative' status which recognises its particular focus on disability sport. Bath is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the BUSA league.

**Durham University** Boat Club prides itself on the number of athletes who have represented their country, at Senior and U23 level, especially those that have not rowed before they came to university. Since 2001 Durham has had 34 current students compete at World Championship level including 2 silver and 3 bronze Senior World Championships medals and 4 bronze, 7 silver and 1 gold World University Games and World U23 Championship medals.

- **High levels of student union engagement**

B.3 There are generally very good relationships between students' unions and universities within the 1994 Group, and this is an area in which the Group shows real strength. The very successful 1994 Group & Unions94 conference in July 2007 helped demonstrate a real willingness to work in partnership. The data collected by Unions94 clearly demonstrate that 1994 Group students' unions are of the most active and engaging in the country. Last year, students' unions in the 1994 Group employed 3,800 students, found external jobs for 4,500, and gave welfare advice to at least 44,000 students. Course representatives are part of the students' union structure in 67% of the 1994 Group, compared to 50% of the sector, and are trained by the students' unions in 92% of the 1994 Group. Also, 1994 Group unions are twice as likely to have Investors in People status.<sup>44</sup>

**Contact at Leicester**

The **University of Leicester** has a very strong and positive relationship with its Students' Union. This is demonstrated in many ways but a particular example is the collaborative approach to promoting and facilitating volunteering activity amongst the student body. *Contact* is a Students' Union organisation encouraging students to take up volunteering opportunities both within and outside the institution. *Contact* is led by an executive committee elected annually by students, thus ensuring a close and democratic link with the general student body.

Important skills and expertise are provided to *Contact* by Careers Service staff, funded through HEFCE's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. They work collaboratively with the *Contact* executive to ensure that projects are effectively administered, that all legal requirements are met, to provide appropriate training and support for students volunteering, and to help students get the most from their experiences through personal reflection and advice and guidance.

B.4 1994 Group institutions have significantly higher levels of participation in student union democratic elections than the sector as a whole. Specifically, 1994 Group students' unions have 40% more election candidates than the UK average, and they have an average of 5.5 sabbatical officers per union compared to a UK average of 4.7. They also have the highest level of voting turnout of any university Group (18.8%), significantly higher than other mission group averages (closest 11.5%) and almost double the UK average.<sup>45</sup>

- **Extra-curricular activity: Volunteering**

B.5 Volunteering is an important part of many students' personal development, and an excellent avenue through which they can engage with the local community. There

<sup>44</sup> Unions94 Survey 2007. Provided by Nick Berg and John Berg

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

are many examples of excellence in volunteering from across the Group, including large scale community action schemes.

#### **Community Action: Student Volunteering at Exeter**

Figures show that 1/20 of the UK sector's volunteering takes place at the **University of Exeter**. Student volunteers at Exeter gave 100,000 hours of service this year to disadvantaged people in the city – the equivalent of 70 full-time voluntary sector workers. In addition to their own in-house projects involving disadvantaged children and lonely and isolated elderly people, students were placed with over 70 local voluntary organisations. The volunteering service, 'Community Action', involves around 600 students and has been adopted as a model of best practice by the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF). Based on a successful partnership between the University, Students' Guild and community groups, Community Action ensures organisations and opportunities are screened and student volunteers are trained, inducted and supported. Enquiries from organisations wishing to join the programme average one a week.

<http://www.ca.ex.ac.uk/About.html>

- B.6 Accreditation of volunteering and other extra-curricular activity can help students recognise the transferable skills that they are acquiring, and encourage them to engage in such activities that make them well-rounded and desirable for employers. There are high levels of volunteering across the 1994 Group and in many cases volunteering and other extra curricular activities are accredited and included on a student's transcript of achievement. The Unions94 data shows that 60% of 1994 Group institutions currently accredit volunteering and other extra-curricular activities, as compared to 51% of the sector as a whole.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Leicester Award for Employability Skills**

The Leicester Award for Employability Skills is a 20 week programme for up to 150 students involved in work-related extra-curricular activities (paid or voluntary employment, enterprise or Students' Union activities). It provides an opportunity for them to reflect on, develop and gain recognition for their broader life or work experiences by participating in learning activities, pursuing an active programme of personal development, and gaining an accredited qualification. The Award helps them to realise their potential through reflection and articulation, and to gain recognition for activities that fall outside the academic arena but which are highly valued by employers.

<http://www.le.ac.uk/ssds/careers/leicesteraward.html>

#### **The York Award**

The York Award, the **University of York's** certificate of personal development, provides a framework within which students can reflect on their experiences in work, volunteering, study and personal interests. Launched in 1998, the programme predates the outcome of the Dearing inquiry and the subsequent campaign to embed personal development planning within HE practice. It enables students to identify the personal development resulting from these activities and builds their abilities to articulate this to future employers. Part of the York Award provision is a portfolio of 25 extracurricular courses, often engaging employer inputs, and focused on a range of skills commonly found in the workplace.

*'I thoroughly enjoyed the York Award and feel it really developed me as a person and an employee.'*

*University of York alumnus*

<http://www.york.ac.uk/services/careers/skills.cfm>

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



- **Professional placements**

- B.7 In addition, 1994 Group universities have excellent examples of placements in industry, which contribute greatly to enhancing a student's employability, by complementing their academic development with hands-on experience of applying their learning and skills in the workplace.

**Professional Training at Surrey**

A pioneer in integrated work experience, The **University of Surrey** has offered professional placements for 40 years. Around 800 placements are established each year for students on undergraduate programmes ranging from engineering and sciences to the arts and humanities, in some 350 organisations in the UK and abroad, including multinationals, SMEs, voluntary bodies and government agencies. Professional Training is an integrated part of degree programmes, with defined learning and assessment outcomes and students receive recognition of their Professional Placement on their degree certificate.

The University of Surrey's expertise in Professional Placement is complemented by its strategic development over the last five years of Personal Development Planning and E-Learning. The three dimensions came together in 2004 in a successful bid to HEFCE to become a Centre of Excellence: the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRE). A central element of this work has been to develop reflective, adaptable individuals capable of maintaining successful careers in a world of supercomplexity, perpetual flux and uncertainty. One measure of the University's impact is found in its consistently topping graduate employment league tables and it is commended by students, assessors and external auditors alike.

<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sceptre/>

**C.) PARTNERSHIP OF LEARNERS**

- C.1 1994 Group institutions have an ideal balance between excellence in research and teaching, two areas of activity which are mutually supportive and serve to reinforce each other. Importantly, institutions in the 1994 Group offer their students the opportunity to learn in a research-enriched community. Also, a smaller scale at 1994 Group institutions ensures that knowledge is shared across subject boundaries rather than creating artificial physical or intellectual silos of learning.

**New Integrated Science Degree at UEA**

The **University of East Anglia** is one of four UK universities, including two other 1994 Group institutions, launching an innovative new interdisciplinary science degree. Endorsed by the Institute of Physics, the Integrated Sciences course brings together physics, chemistry and mathematics, providing students with a thorough grounding in the sciences.

This blurring of the boundaries between different scientific disciplines means that students shouldn't feel restricted to a single subject if their interests are broader. It is hoped that the course will appeal to students interested in science but not wanting to specialise in just one subject at degree level. Through the Integrated Science degree at UEA graduates will find themselves well prepared to go on to more specialist scientific studies. Underpinning the course is the idea that new global challenges will increasingly require a scientifically literate workforce. Tackling climate change is one example which will increasingly require people with varied skills. The course is being launched at UEA and also the universities of Leicester, Surrey and London South Bank. At UEA, Integrated Sciences is one of the possible pathways through the prestigious Natural Sciences degree.

<http://www1.uea.ac.uk/cm/home/schools/sci/natsci/Integrated%20Sciences>

- C.2 In the NSS, students made clear their appreciation for the 1994 Group's style of teaching. The Group's average for 'Teaching' was significantly higher than other mission groups and the sector as a whole, and many member institutions received outstanding scores in this column (see Fig. 3).

**Fig 3: NSS 3 Year Average 2005-07**

Institution	Teaching	Institution	Teaching
Bath	79	Queen Mary	81
Birkbeck	86	Reading	81
Durham	82	Royal Holloway	82
East Anglia	84	St Andrews	88
Essex	79	SOAS	83
Exeter	83	Surrey	78
Goldsmiths	82	Sussex	80
Lancaster	82	Warwick	82
Leicester	85	York	82
Loughborough	83		
<b>Sector Average</b>			<b>80</b>

▪ **Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)**

- C.3 To draw examples of teaching and learning excellence from across the 1994 Group, the table below shows the 18 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), that were established in 2005 using HEFCE funding, in which 1994 Group members are involved. Those in which the 1994 Group member is the lead HEI are marked with an asterisk (\*)<sup>47</sup>:

Fig. 3: CETLs	1994 Group institution
Active Learning in Computing (ALiC)	Durham University *
Teaching Excellence and Mentoring of Postgraduates using Statistics (TEMPUS)	Lancaster University *
Genetics Education – Networking of Innovation and Excellence (GENIE)	University of Leicester *
Spatial Literacy in Teaching (SPLINT)	University of Leicester *
Centre for Excellence in Employer-linked Engineering Education	Loughborough University *
Centre for Excellence in the Provision of University-wide Mathematics and Statistics Support	Loughborough University *
Languages of the Wider World	SOAS *
4E CETL for Clinical and Communications Skills	Queen Mary *
Centre for Career Management Skills (CCMS)	University of Reading *
Centre for Excellence in Teaching & Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills	University of Reading *
Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRE)	University of Surrey *
Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creativity	University of Sussex *
The Capital Centre (Creativity and Performance in Teaching and Learning)	University of Warwick *

<sup>47</sup> 'Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning,' HEFCE, March 2005. See: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl/final/brochure.pdf>

The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research	University of Warwick *
White Rose Centre for Excellence in the Teaching and Learning of Enterprise (CETLE)	University of York *
Inclusivity in Contemporary Music Culture	University of Durham
Centre for Excellence in Innovative Physics Teaching	University of Leicester University of Reading
LearnHigher	University of Reading

- **Learning in a research-enriched community**

C.4 1994 Group institutions are amongst the most research-intensive in the UK, and they offer a unique balance between teaching and research, operating in the strong belief that there is a clear connection between excellent and innovative research and the highest quality teaching. Research-led teaching is key to the 1994 Group's mission, and a large majority of the top academics who achieved the Group's outstanding results in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise also teach students.

**Fig. 4: 2001 RAE results - 1994 Group Averages**

Research Active Selected Staff	RATING		
	4+	5+	5*
88%	92%	65%	17%

**Fig. 5: % Distribution of Research Staff (FTE) (2005/06)**

	Total Research Staff	Teaching & research	Research only
1994 Group	15,346	63%	37%

C.5 The RAE results (Fig. 4) demonstrate that the research undertaken at 1994 Group institutions is consistently of the highest quality.<sup>48</sup> Also, the Group's high proportion of staff with a combined teaching and research function (Fig. 5) shows that such high ratings are being achieved by staff who are also teaching students. This demonstrates the excellent balance between teaching and research excellence achieved at 1994 Group institutions, and their commitment to providing top-quality research-led teaching to their students.

- **Learning Spaces**

C.6 There are increasing examples across the Group of providing flexible and innovative learning space to students, which integrates technology into the overall learning experience.

**Warwick's Learning Grid**

The **University of Warwick's** Learning Grid is a development occupying a space of about 1350 square metres on 2 floors in University House, with capacity for approximately 300 students. It is managed by the Library and is open 24x7, only closing on Christmas Day. The facility provides an exciting, innovative, integrated, flexible

<sup>48</sup> '2001 Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome,' HEFCE; SHEFC; ELWA. December 2001

space that supports students by facilitating independent learning in new and changing ways. It, for instance, supports individual study, group problem-solving activities, team working and presentation work, including an emphasis on facilitating the development and delivery of student presentations and supporting students in the use of digital multi-media for their assignments. It provides a wireless network, capacity for up to 10,000 reference use student texts, and careers resources. A wide range of equipment is also provided, including scanners and document visualisers through to electronic whiteboards, video-editing facilities, networked pcs, video cameras with playback capability, etc. These facilities are located within study environments ranging from rooms for formal presentations to soft seating.

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/grid/>

### **Durham's Technocafe**

As part the Centre for Excellence in Active Learning in Computing, **Durham University's** highly innovative learning space, The Technocafe, is providing students with a workspace for the future. Based on the American Diner format, groups are located in booths (pods), with each seating 6-8 students. Each pod contains a range of technologies including tablet PCs, laptops, interactive whiteboards and communication tools, and there is a wireless envelope to facilitate the use of students' own equipment.

The entire environment is designed to facilitate communication, including the careful selection of equipment to ensure that it does not block communication sight lines across the table. Each pod is open at only one end, allowing students privacy but critically enabling tutors to easily move between pods.

The Technocafe is also challenging the way that lectures are delivered. Using the lecture console and broadcasting units, staff members present lectures, which students watch on screens in their pods. Students can use the pod's microphone to provide feedback on any activity or ask questions.

<http://www.dur.ac.uk/computer.science/undergraduate/technocafe/>

## ▪ ***Student-focused estate developments***

- C.7 There are also examples of estate developments which bring student-focused facilities, services and social areas onto one site, offering students 'one-stop shops' which make it more clear what is on offer to them and make their everyday lives more convenient.

### **Two Student-Focused Estate Developments at Reading**

The **University of Reading** has opened two new multimillion pound student-focused facilities, which provide a heart to the student-focused activity on campus. Firstly, The Hub is a significant extension to the Student Union which provides Student Union-run services including new offices, advice and help desks, new space for the radio station and the student press, shops and meeting rooms.

Secondly, the University has also opened a new, £5 million Student Services Building, the Carrington Building, situated adjacent to the Hub. The Carrington building provides a one stop shop for student advice and other services, including the learning advisory team, the disability offices, the careers service, and the student finance office. The Carrington Building is also a "green" building: it is environmentally-friendly and the first on campus to have geothermal heating.

## **D.) JOINED-UP STUDENT JOURNEY**

- D.1 1994 Group universities engage as much as possible with students at every step on their educational journey, from engagement before and during admissions processes, providing excellent support and experiences during university life, encouraging progression through to postgraduate level, and conducting continued engagement with alumni. Furthermore, they are institutions rich in cultural diversity with an international context that permeates through all of their activity, and they are

flexible institutions that recognise all levels and modes of study, all of which works to enhance the overall student journey.

#### **Effective Researcher Development Programme at the University of Exeter**

The **University of Exeter** has developed a comprehensive, flexible and innovative development programme for all PhD early career researchers, in recognition of the critical importance for students, the University and the sector of providing excellent opportunities for all research students to become effective researchers.

The Effective Researcher Development Programme is both student-centred and needs-based. It recognises that research students are distinct from taught programme students and have very different priorities, expectations and aspirations. It also recognises that within the PhD student cohort, individual researcher needs and demands can and do vary considerably. Research students from all disciplines and backgrounds rate the programme very highly and it has become a central feature of the research student experience at Exeter. Engagement has increased dramatically over the past few years and satisfaction rates are over 95%. The programme was recognised in 2006 by winning an AUA Excellence in Higher Education Management Award.

#### **Young Alumni at Essex**

In the past, many universities, the **University of Essex** included, have relied on former students' nostalgia for their institution for the basis of their alumni programme. The commonly held assumption was that alumni would not 're-engage' with their alma mater until years or even decades had passed. Essex has now departed from this view and is being much more pro-active in establishing the alumni relationship before students even graduate.

Students are formally introduced to the activities of the alumni programme through a series of communication in their final year and receive welcome packs at graduation. Alumni-related activities available to current students include an annual careers' fair where students can network with alumni and a class yearbook heavily branded by the Alumni Office.

The University is also taking advantage of existing social and professional networking tools such as *Facebook* and *Viadeo*, in order to cement the Essex identity post-graduation.

#### ▪ **Engagement with Schools**

- D.2 1994 Group is currently engaged in a joint project with the DCSF to assess the impact of the 14-19 reforms on member institutions to ensure that students who have taken the new diploma qualifications are able to be welcomed onto degree courses at the very best universities. The Group's work on 14-19 reform is reflective of member institutions' strong shared belief in the role that universities play within the wider community. All universities play a central role in the community in which they are situated and 1994 Group universities, located in the main outside of the major civic centres, play an even greater role than many. Member institutions, drawing on their world class research, teaching methods and knowledge of business interaction can support schools to improve standards and raise achievement rates. Crucially, universities' public role supporting schools can alter the perception of the role of universities. If school students view the transition to higher education as a natural progression rather than an alien concept, real progress towards achieving the widening participation targets might then be achieved.

#### **Enterprize: Schools Engagement at Bath**

*Enterprize* is a project in which a team of **University of Bath's** students, working closely with the University's Widening Access Department, work with a diverse range of secondary school pupils at three schools in the local area. The project is designed to enable year nine students to develop their enterprise and personal success skills through a series of workshops.

The year nine students finish the programme by pitching a business idea to a panel of judges and the most innovative and well presented pitches from each school are entered into the finals. The finals take place at University of Bath's Students' Union SIFE Student Enterprise Conference and the students will also gain first

hand experience of enterprise through helping the team to run the conference itself. *Enterprize* is based firmly on principles of fair-trade, making it an ideal tool to teach the children business ethics in a fun and motivating way.

- **Part time provision**

D.3 Part-time students constitute a significant element in the continuing growth of the sector, and this is a group which plays a central role in extending higher-level skills, widening participation, and lifelong learning. Many 1994 Group members have excellent provision for part-time students and are adapting well to the demands for this important format of study. Also, in Birkbeck the Group has one of the leading specialist providers of part-time study in the UK.

#### **Part-Time Provision at Birkbeck**

**Birkbeck** has been London's only specialist provider of part-time, evening higher education since it was founded in 1823. Established experts in the field of part-time education, the College has a real understanding of the needs of its students, who are juggling daytime work or family commitments with evening study.

Birkbeck's academic staff have a wealth of experience and expertise in supporting and encouraging part-time students undertaking study on top of work and other commitments. The College provides excellent facilities focused on the part-time students' requirements, including a library which is open late, excellent computing facilities, and an evening nursery.

Adetoun Baruwa, 37, BSc Psychology, said "I chose Birkbeck because the School of Psychology is highly rated for research. And being able to study part-time as well as hold down a full-time job meant that I didn't have to struggle financially. I have a mortgage and financial security is very important to me."

- **International Students**

D.4 Internationalism permeates all aspects of university life at 1994 Group members, and in particular through the student experience. Both international and domestic students benefit from a cosmopolitan experience, and one in which a truly international context is integrated within all aspects of the teaching and learning and research that happens at the university. International students at 1994 Group institutions show high satisfaction in comparison to the sector, particularly in areas relating to student support.<sup>49</sup> The average proportion of international students at 1994 Group institutions is 20% and the proportion is particularly high at SOAS and Essex.

#### **International Student Experience at Essex**

Founded in the 1960s as an international university in its outlook, spirit and recruitment, the cultural contribution of around 120 different nationalities of overseas students (around 40% of total student numbers) has always been a unique and valued attribute of the **University of Essex** student experience. The diversity of the student body creates a rich cosmopolitan community that is appreciated by UK and international students alike – evidenced by many positive comments in our student satisfaction surveys.

Specialist services and support for international students – for example free in-session English language classes for both students and their families – complement and augment the full range of services provided for all students by Student Support and the Essex Students' Union. As a result, Essex students absorb and exchange cultures not just through study but by living together and making lasting friends from all over the world.

Essex's support for international students was commended in its 2003 QAA institutional audit, and in 2005 the University won the Queen's Award for Enterprise in recognition of its success in recruiting international students.

<sup>49</sup> Data provided by I-Graduate: <http://www.i-graduate.org/>

- ***The Student Voice: Measuring Satisfaction and Addressing the Challenges***

D.5 1994 Group institutions each have ways of keeping in touch with their students and listening to their opinions and reviews of all aspects of university life. In combination with national surveys and reports, these are helping universities to address the challenges set to them by their students.

**Sussex: Using Focus Groups to Understand Student Perspectives**

The Department of Politics and Contemporary European Studies at the **University of Sussex** has been determined to better understand student perspectives on teaching and learning. Student Evaluation Questionnaires have long been the standard means by which we get feedback on each course, but they only offer limited insight into student opinion, and seem to be regarded as a tedious formality by some students. The Department, therefore, has therefore trained several of its teaching faculty to run focus groups with undergraduates. Students are selected randomly paid to participate, and then invited to expound freely and at length on their courses, lecturers, tutors, learning resources, and university life in general. The frankness of the students has sometimes been startling, but always interesting, often positive and occasionally worrying. This has given a far better insight into the Department's – and indeed, the students' own - areas of strength and weakness, and has helped set an agenda for action at departmental level and beyond. In essence, when used in the right way, focus groups can help improve communication, accountability and responsiveness.

**Lancaster: New Student Satisfaction Survey**

Last year **Lancaster University** designed and ran an online Student Experience Survey, in which over 1000 second year undergraduates and 1000 postgraduates took part. As well as giving opinions on existing facilities many gave detailed comments with suggestions for further improvements. These have already proved extremely useful for planning future campus developments.

The overwhelming message from this survey was a positive one. Over 80% of students rated their experience as either excellent or good, highlighting particularly the college system, academic departments, accommodation and the campus setting. Among the areas that students thought needed changing were sports facilities, group learning spaces, and accessibility to facilities on campus. The University is now responding by designing a new sports centre with improved sport and leisure facilities, planning to create an IT enabled group learning space, and planning to centralise various facilities and make them more conveniently accessible.

## 4. Enhancing the Student Experience:

### Challenges for the Sector, 2007-2012

- 4.1 This report has taken a snapshot of the various factors affecting the student experience across the UK sector. It has demonstrated the 1994 Group's particular position within this environment and the willingness of the Group to lead this important ongoing debate. It is now important to identify the challenges that the sector faces in taking forward the enhancement of the student experience over the next five years if UK HE is to retain, refocus and reinforce its world-leading position in this area and to respond to the new directions set out by government.
- 4.2 We conclude that there are **seven priority areas** for the sector to take forward if we are to meet the challenges of a changing environment of student experiences and expectations. The 1994 Group has begun detailed discussions with stakeholders to agree how these challenges will be met over the short to medium term. Detailed announcements on this ongoing work will emerge over the coming months. It is essential that the sector and government embrace these challenges and come together to see their implementation.

#### ▪ **Seven high priority areas:**

- 4.3 The high priority areas are those in which the Group has engaged and has shaped into projects already, and will continue to focus on in the coming months. These five areas are:
- 1.) A requirement to provide transparent and accurate information around the student experience
  - 2.) Towards the 2020 Workforce: Promoting the well-rounded graduate
  - 3.) Promoting the student voice
  - 4.) Engagement with schools and colleges
  - 5.) Student-focused resources
  - 6.) International strategy and internationalisation
  - 7.) Excellence and enhancement in teaching and learning

These are described in more detail below:

#### 1.) **A requirement to provide transparent and accurate information around the student experience**

- i) There is a need across the sector for a wider availability of data about the student experience, in order both to better inform the decisions of applicants at all levels, and also to help HEIs identify problem areas and work to enhance aspects of the student experience. Currently, sector agencies gather datasets on an annual basis, which provide a rich source of information on the nature of the sector, but these are not generally used for these purposes. The 1994 Group will work to ensure that such existing data which can enhance students' and other stakeholders' understanding of the student experience is made available in an effective way.



- ii) As the sole national indicator of its kind, the NSS is fundamental to understanding the undergraduate student experience and it must continue. The Group strongly supports the most positive outcome of the NSS, that it has enabled institutions to highlight areas which need attention and allowed them to focus efforts on directly enhancing aspects of the student experience in order to improve student satisfaction. The Group will continue to engage with the NSS steering group to ensure that the survey is developed towards maximum usefulness and is provided to applicants in the most helpful way. Of course, the NSS relates principally to undergraduate students, with also some importance for international students. The Group encourages a similar national survey for postgraduate students as this would also prove extremely useful and important to the sector. Excellent recent examples of what can be done are the launch of the Unistats web service, the reform of the UCAS HE entry tariff and entry profiles, the development of a centralised postgraduate admissions service (UKPASS), and the growing I-Graduate survey into international student expectations and experiences. However, there is a need to enhance these with even more accessibility of information.
  
- (iii) In a diversifying marketplace there is a growing need for more widely available data on admissions. There is a weakness in admissions data currently available as it is often eighteen months out of date when it becomes available, and there is a growing need for live data to measure the trends of the admissions market. This particularly applies to postgraduate and international applications. While institutions can get a sense of where they are on student recruitment each year through publication of national undergraduate applications statistics via UCAS, there is no similar national collation of postgraduate or international statistics.

## **2.) Towards the 2020 Workforce: Promoting the well-rounded graduate**

- i) It is fundamental that all graduates across the sector benefit in the best way possible from their higher education experience, and leave university as mature, well-rounded individuals with clearly recognisable skills which will help them in employment. The 1994 Group will strive to achieve recognition amongst the top employers and the sector skills councils for well-rounded graduates who benefit from excellent academic and non-academic experiences, and to ensure that the value of these graduates is understood. In recognition of employer demand for skills obtained outside the academic curriculum, universities should develop mechanisms to accredit non-academic activities such as volunteering. Also, in recognition of the need for students to support themselves financially while at university, this accreditation should be stretched to include skills obtained during paid employment, perhaps delivered in arrangement between university job shops and employers.
  
- (ii) The Sainsbury Review<sup>50</sup> has identified the need for further information to be provided to students and employers around subject trends, graduate jobs and salaries, and subjects which employers and government believe have shortages of graduates with key skills. The review recommends that one way of ensuring data is as accurate and effective as possible is to reform the current 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education' survey, extending the

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<sup>50</sup> Lord Sainsbury of Turville, 'The Race to the Top: A Review of Government's Science and Innovation Policies,' October 2007.

time period so it tracks graduates three and a half years after leaving university. The 1994 Group will work with HEFCE to see the full implementation of these essential recommendations.

### **3.) Promoting the student voice**

In a marketplace in which all students are increasingly being viewed, and viewing themselves, as consumers it is extremely important for universities across the sector to make a clear statement on the reciprocal relationship between students and their universities in the development of their knowledge and skills. The 1994 Group clearly supports this principle of partnership and, as part of this, it is engaged in joint activity with the NUS examining the relationship between universities and students' unions. This new approach requires a mature relationship to be developed between HE institutions, the NUS, and local students' unions so that mutual trust can be built up along with the recognition of the need to engage in sometimes challenging debates on these often controversial issues. We strongly believe that more can be achieved in partnership than in conflict and it is essential that the sector and the government promote and listen to the student voice. The creation of an independent National Student Forum and the appointment of Lord Triesman as the first Minister for Students are excellent steps in promoting the voice of English students. Alongside these developments the UK sector, the NUS, and local students' unions must proceed with practical steps to fully promote the student voice and implement a partnership approach to the student experience.

### **4.) Engagement with schools and colleges**

Effective engagement with schools and colleges is extremely important in efforts to increase and widen participation in higher education. Already, the Prime Minister and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have set up a National Council for Educational Excellence to advise how to develop a world-class education system in England for children and young people up to the age of 19 and explore how to link industry, higher education and the voluntary sector more closely to headteachers, teachers and parents. The government has also initiated the new 14-19 curriculum reforms including the new diplomas, which will begin in September 2008. At their heart, the diplomas offer the potential to become a radical alternative to the existing curriculum, and they have been made absolutely central to the reforms of the DCSF. In recognition of this potential the 1994 Group is currently engaged in a joint project with the DCSF to assess the impact of the 14-19 reforms on its member institutions to ensure that students who have taken the new diploma qualifications are able to be welcomed onto degree courses at the full range of universities. The Group will soon be publishing the outcome of this research project, and it intends that outcomes will lead to more engagement from the HE sector in this essential activity.

## **5.) Student-focussed resources**

There is a clear link between levels and quality of support, facilities and resources on offer to students and the levels of satisfaction students have with their experience at university. Enhancing the student experience depends very much on universities understanding the needs of students in relation to the services, support and facilities they can offer, and formulating strategies in relation to these student-focused resources. Discussions between the 1994 Group and Unions94 have highlighted improvements to a university's physical infrastructure as a key area in which to enhance the student experience. Long-term efforts should continue to be made across the sector to make physical infrastructure more student friendly. Student-facing services and facilities should be joined-up and accessible, ideally being housed under one roof or in one area as part of student-focused 'one-stop shops'.

## **6.) International strategy and internationalisation**

- (i) The UK currently has a world-leading position in the education of international students. However, there are clear challenges to this position from established markets in the US, aggressive markets in Australia and in Europe where degrees are now being widely taught in English, and the huge investment in the HE system in China and India which has reduced the number of students from those countries studying overseas. If the UK is to maintain and develop its world-leading position, significant steps will need to be taken. A joined up approach is needed to confront this problem which will involve the sector, government, devolved governments, the British Council, funding agencies and other sector stakeholders. The Group is committed to take forward the development of an international education summit at which these issues can be debated and action agreed. There is a clear need for more availability of up to date information regarding international student admissions and experiences, in order to keep ahead of international trends which may threaten the UK system in the longer-term.
- (ii) The 1994 Group has recently concluded a benchmarking project around international profiles and activity at member institutions, which was carried out by the Association of Commonwealth Universities. The project was aimed at understanding how universities have reached their international strategies and identifying areas to work on to address the needs of international students. Also, meetings between the 1994 Group and UCAS have highlighted areas in which more current data could be made available to the Group and to the sector around international student admissions. There is potential for this data to be collected across all disciplines for all students and provided on a monthly basis.

## **7.) Excellence and enhancement in teaching and learning**

It is important that the learning of students is enriched by the high-quality research around them in the academic community, and that their learning takes place within a truly international context. It is important for universities to keep ahead of student expectations in regards to the teaching and learning they provide, and it is vital to maximise the potential brought by technological

advances in their teaching and learning techniques. The NSS and other student surveys are a key way of gathering feedback from students so the sector can move forward. Students know how they want to be taught and have ideas about how techniques can be improved. They play an important role as 'change agents', challenging the established modes of teaching and learning, and contributing to making it more exciting and relevant for themselves and future generations of students. Universities should increasingly look to provide innovative and well facilitated learning space to provide an engaging academic experience, and must greet the challenge of reaching the best balance of physical and electronic resources they provide to their students.

## ▪ **Reviewing the Challenges**

- 4.4 As a group we are committed to addressing these challenges and we will be monitoring their impact as we as a sector take them forward. As part of this process we will undertake a similar review in five years time which will set out a view of the student experience in 2012. This will determine the impact of the recommendations we have made in the current report and will set out a further report on student demands for the following five years.

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