



To Encapsulate Higher  
Education Learner Voice at  
Macclesfield College and to  
Produce a Student Written  
Submission (SWS) for the QAA  
Review in April 2015

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this report is to encapsulate Higher Education learner voice at Macclesfield College. This will give a good insight into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of how Macclesfield College is performing from a student perspective. The overall aim is to complete a Student Written Submission (SWS) for the QAA Higher Education Review to give an unbiased report from students, completed on behalf of the Lead Student Representative, myself, Stephanie Beaden.

Key findings within this report include how students find Macclesfield College's approach to academic standards, learning opportunities and public information overall very good. The feedback given from learners has been largely positive and only a few negative comments have been received, such as certain learning resources which need improving like more books within their subject area.

Key recommendations include the need for student voice to be improved so that students are more aware of who their student representatives are, and how the college is making improvements in response to what the students have told them. Also the complaints and appeals procedure needs looking at to give students more of a chance to understand what it actually is, so if they ever need to use it they can. Also, some of the learning resources need improving, such as the more in depth books for certain subjects.

## **Background to Higher Education at Macclesfield College**

Macclesfield College is General, Further and Higher Education College, which is situated in the centre of Macclesfield town in the North West of England. There are approximately 1200 FE Students and 130 Higher Education students of which 108 were on full time programmes. Their mission is “Macclesfield College: Putting learners first” (Macclesfield College, n.d.). This shows their absolute commitment to their students. The college also caters for Adult learners and holds a number of Adult Learner courses, alongside Apprentice training, work related training, and courses for 14-16 year olds.

Throughout 2014/15, there are several higher education offered at Macclesfield College. These include:

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Awarding Body</b>
HNC Engineering	Pearson EDXCEL
HND Public Services	Pearson EDXCEL
HND Sport, Coaching and Sports Development	Pearson EDXCEL
Foundation degree award in Supporting Teaching and Learning	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Foundation degree award in Business Management	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Foundation degree award in Events Management	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Foundation degree award in Aircraft Maintenance	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Foundation degree award in Early Years	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)
Foundation degree award in Public and Community Services	Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU)

(Macclesfield College, 2014)

To gather fair and unbiased information about the higher education provision at Macclesfield College, it is important that they take into account the views and opinions of the students at Macclesfield College who are studying Higher Education courses, such as Foundation Degrees and Higher Nationals. This report will focus on what the students' views and opinions are so that recommendations can be formed to enable Macclesfield College improve the areas which have been highlighted.

## **Initial Views**

As a student currently studying the Foundation degree Business & Management, my opinion from my own experience and fellow students on my course highlights the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are apparent. Other perspectives will also be discussed throughout the remainder of the report.

### **Strengths**

- It is very beneficial being with teachers who students have a close student-teacher relationship with. Teachers know their students well and know exactly how they work and where their strengths and weaknesses lie.
- A classroom environment is also highly beneficial as it is what students have been used to all throughout their school life so they know how it works and what will work well for them with regards to learning; for example their learning styles.
- A classroom environment also means that students get a lot more one-to-one time with their mentors where they can raise any issues that they may have.
- Teachers at Macclesfield College are well informed and very knowledgeable within their subjects; making it extremely beneficial to the student as the students can get a lot from each lesson that they attend.
- The IT systems are very good; they have been updated recently and with some Higher Education students only being in just one day per week, it is extremely useful being able to access the college documents from a personal computer at home.

## **Weaknesses**

- Some students may feel like they are missing out with being in a college environment. They may feel like they want to be in a more 'mature' environment around people their own age. At college, Higher Education students are still with students who can be as young as 16.
- Higher Education at Macclesfield College isn't very well publicised. A Foundation Degree or Higher National qualification isn't something a lot of students after they leave 6<sup>th</sup> form think about. However, it is an extremely convenient way of learning if students have family or job commitments.
- Students can find it difficult to keep a good '*work-college/university-life balance*', because most students find it hard to find the right job that provides exactly enough work experience at the right time.

## **Opportunities**

- The college could improve advertising for Higher Education. They could do open days at local schools so that students in their last year of 6<sup>th</sup> form or college can make a more informed decision on their next steps in Higher Education.
- Although it would be very difficult to find a time where Higher Education students were separated from A-Level or BTEC level students, it would be much better. This could involve the college making a separate building dedicated to Higher Education, so it had a more 'University' feel about it.
- The college could get involved with employers to ensure that students are only working approximately 20 hours a week. It can be very difficult for the students to convince their managers that they need to lower their hours to keep up a good work-life-college/university balance.

## **Threats**

- Students may miss the opportunity to come to Macclesfield college because they are unsure of what a Foundation Degree or Higher National is, or that Macclesfield College provides a Higher Education opportunity at all.
- Students may decide not to come to study Higher Education at Macclesfield College because of the 'college' feel they still may have.
- Finding a good work life university/college balance may result in students dropping out of the courses because they cannot cope with the work and amount of studying they have to do.

In order to gain a fully rounded, unbiased picture for the project, a mix of primary, secondary, qualitative and quantitative research will be collected, and analysed.

By sending out a questionnaire, it was useful to gather qualitative and quantitative data about certain aspects of the college, and how students find Higher Education life. It also gives students the chance to voice their opinions without worrying that their identity will be given away – the questionnaires only asked what course and year they were in so no personal information is given away about them. This way they were more likely to be more honest about how they feel about their Higher Education experience at Macclesfield College. The questionnaires were used to target multiple Higher Education students from a variety of course

A focus group with the students regarding student employability was a good opportunity to get information about how they feel about certain aspects of student employability, for example how they feel the college supports them with employability and how they feel that the college could improve it.

Student perceptions are obtained by QDP, an independent feedback service. (QDP, n.d.) The college takes these at certain intervals during a learners programme to inform the college of what is going well and not so well. SPOC results are very useful in looking at students opinions on their course, and their time at Macclesfield College. There are 3 SPOC Results from 3 different Foundation degree award courses; Sport (Coaching & Development), Public Services & Business

Management. These were only taken in October 2014 so results are very relevant and can easily be compared to results which are found from the questionnaire to see if there are any similarities or differences.

## **Main Findings**

Overall, there have been 65 responses from the questionnaires. The responses came from Business and IT 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years, Business and Management 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years, Applied Chemistry, Electrical Engineering 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years, General Engineering, Supporting Teaching and Learning 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Years, and Aircraft Maintenance. 30 of these students were 1<sup>st</sup> years, and 35 were 2<sup>nd</sup> years. This, therefore, will give a fully rounded picture from different perspectives.

### **Section A - Academic Standards**

Section A criteria is about academic standards and how Macclesfield Colleges' higher education performs with a variety of certain aspects from whether the students find assessments more challenging as they progress, to whether they feel that their feedback is timely and helpful.

#### **Areas of Good Practice**

- The majority of students found their feedback on their assessments timely and helpful. Only the 2nd years responses were taken from these two questions, as the overall responses from the 1<sup>st</sup> years was that it was "too soon to answer". This shows that majority of students (100% for timely and 94% for helpful) are finding their feedback timely and most importantly helpful, which is useful for students studying in HE because they have tight deadlines and its important its clear of what they should be doing and where they can improve for their next assessment.
- 100% of the 2nd year students found that their assessments are becoming more challenging throughout their course. Similarly to the first question, the 1<sup>st</sup> year students found this question "too soon" to answer. It is good that students are finding their assessments more challenging because it means that they will be developing new levels of thinking and progressing within their assessment. This



is slightly more than the previous Student Written Submission (IQER 2011) when 98% found work becoming more challenging 4 years ago, and now there is 100%.

- Out of 65 students, 40 attended an induction. Some gave reasons for not having an induction such as “Late Starter” or “Didn’t Attend.” Out of the 40 students who attended, 38 said they found it useful, and 2 said that they didn’t.
- 62 out of 65 (95%) of students are aware of their course specific rules regarding plagiarism. This shows good awareness of students about plagiarism, as it is a problem which can be dealt with seriously.
- 51 out of 65 (78%) of students understand their course, and what is expected of them to gain a certain mark. This is beneficial to students as it optimises their potential for receiving a good mark because they understand what they need to do.
- 48 out of 65 (73%) students received the Study Skills presentation, and out of the 48, 46 (95%) of students said that they found it beneficial to them. This means that the students will have taken with them new skills and would have had a better understanding on the systems of Macclesfield College (e.g. the e-books on the electronic library system.)

### **Areas for Development**

- With regards to the induction 4 ( out of 40 ) students commented on the length of time and felt it was too long. Other students thought it was unorganized and some wanted more from the induction, for example one student said they would have liked a fuller breakdown of their course. This also links in with the ‘SPOC Survey’, where 2 out of 7 students said that they ‘disagreed mostly’ and one ‘disagreed completely’ that the induction helped them settle into Macclesfield College.
- Even though the majority of students understand what is expected of them to gain a certain mark (51 out of 65, which is 78%), this still leaves 14 students who don’t fully understand. Every student should understand this because it means they can do they best that they possibly can in their assignments.

## **Section B - Learning opportunities**

Section B criteria is about learning opportunities and how Macclesfield Colleges' higher education performs within different areas for example whether the students feel that the staff are fully trained and qualified, or whether they know about the Higher Education complaints and appeals procedure.

### **Areas of Good Practice**

- 46 (70%) of students said that they have had the opportunity to give constructive feedback to a tutor.
- 35 students have given constructive feedback, and as a result 28 students said that their lectures improved. This is beneficial for the students as it means that the tutors are working alongside the students to ensure that students are getting the most from lectures.
- 60 out of 65 (92%) of students said that the content of the course is covered within the lectures they receive. This is beneficial to the students as it means that they are receiving all of the relevant information they need to be able to successfully complete assignments. Some students gave comments on this question, such as "tutors cover content and make it easy to understand."
- On a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest, 10 being the highest), the learning resources received a majority score of 8, with 32% of students saying this is what they felt it deserved.
- 69% of students are aware of the complaints and appeals procedure, which is more than half of the students who are asked. This is good because it shows that if students have any queries about marked assignments, they know about the complaints and appeals procedure and how to go through it.

### **Areas for Development**

- 34 out of 65 students (52%) "have never given their views" about Macclesfield College, meaning that they wouldn't know if their general views about Macclesfield College were listened too or not.
- Again, 35 out of 65 (53%) of students 'didn't know' if their student rep feeds back information to teaching staff to make an improvement. Some comments given by students were "Don't know who my student rep is."

- Although 69% of students know about the Complaints and Appeals procedure, it still leaves 31% who don't. This means that if there is a student who doesn't agree with a mark or who isn't happy with something, they won't know that there is a procedure that they can turn to for help and advice.
- The Learning Resources within Macclesfield College were graded an '8 out of 10' by the majority of students. However, there were a lot of comments on this matter and there were a few common themes which ran throughout. These were a greater selection of more detailed books, more time on computers rather than being in tutorial lessons, and improvements of the wi-fi. This is an also issue that was raised in the previous written submission in 2011.

## **Section C - Public Information**

Section C criteria is about public information and how the Higher Education students find this information. It is useful information to gather as it means Macclesfield College are able to improve on any 'areas for development' to so that future higher education students are more aware of the College and the current students can have current issues resolved.

### **Areas of Good Practice**

- Macclesfield College has a 'College Prospectus' which is extremely useful and full of information about the colleges HE Courses and what is expected on them. Similarly, this information can also be found online, where 93%, students said that they find Macclesfield Colleges' website user friendly. This is extremely useful for students as it means that they are able to navigate the website with ease and it isn't a stressful situation when trying to find something they need on the website. Having a user friendly website is a vital part for the students at Macclesfield College as it means they are able to access work from home via Moodle, the college's intranet.
- Macclesfield College also connect to the public in a variety of ways on social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. From research taken, their Twitter page has 2,369 followers, (Twitter, n.d.), on Facebook, they have 2,936 likes and has had 2,637 visits. (Facebook, n.d.) This is a considerably large

following for Macclesfield College and they are being effective at connecting to the public because they are using up to date techniques.

- 60 students (92.3%) said that all of the information on the website is accurate, which also adds to the user friendliness of Macclesfield Colleges website. If students are getting the correct information it means they have all of the necessary tools from home and when in the college to let their learning process run smoothly.
- From the 'SPOC Survey' which was taken by Macclesfield College in October 2014, 19 students responded. From this questionnaire, 12 students answered "agree completely" and 5 answered "agree mostly" to the question: "The website is a useful source of info."

### **Areas for Development**

- 5 out of 65 (7%) of students have said that they have found some issues with Macclesfield Colleges website, and these are things such as inaccurate information. Examples of this are "How many hours the course is, and how much it costs." Also students said that the "smoking on campus" information and "not enough information on course" also amounted to inaccurate information.

## **Enhancement**

### **Areas of Good Practice**

- On Macclesfield Colleges' website, there is a section under 'Student Hub' which is called 'Student Voice'. The two subsections within Student Voice are 'Student Union' and 'Student Feedback.' This shows good use of Macclesfield Colleges website to get the student involved in giving their opinions and giving them the opportunity to do so. The 'Student Voice' section is also on the HE Hub, which is specifically for students who are studying in Higher Education within the College.
- From the 'SPOC Survey', out of 19 students who responded, 13 students said that they 'Agree Completely' to the question 'Know who to ask for help for problems.' This is quite a high number and shows that the right guidance is in place for students who need help.

## **Areas for Development**

- Although Macclesfield College have specific sections for students to give their opinions or feedback anything they wish to raise their voice and get their opinions heard, from the feedback from students when asked “Are your general views about Macclesfield College listened to?” 34 out of 65 students said that they have never given their views, therefore they simply don’t know whether their general views about Macclesfield College are listened to.

## **Theme – Student Employability**

The theme that Macclesfield College chose to analyse was ‘Student Employability’. This is a good theme to explore as it gives Macclesfield College further rooms for development and they can analyse ways in which they are already successful within this theme.

- There are several Higher Education courses within Macclesfield College which give students the chance to work alongside their studies. This makes studying a more flexible option for many students. For example, the Foundation Degree in Business and Management requires students to work approximately 20 hours so that they are getting as much hands on experience as possible, and they are able to relate their Business and Management work to real life studies. The majority of Foundation Degrees within Macclesfield College require students to work alongside their studies.
- Additionally, there is a section on the Higher Education section of Macclesfield Colleges’ website which gives students information about ‘impartial advice’ on careers guidance on how to book 1:1 appointments.

With a small focus group of year 2 Foundation Degree Business & Management students, it was possible to find out their opinions of employability at Macclesfield College. Students were asked 3 questions about employability, and their views were all varied. For example, when asked ‘*How do you feel Macclesfield College and your course supports you with employability?*’ The responses were “*It doesn’t, I need more information,*” where another student said “*It teaches us universal employability*”

*skills which we can apply to any business*". When asked 'How do you find working and studying at the same time?' One student said "Tiring but you get used to it." And another said "Very rewarding as you get kept motivated and busy." The other question was "How could the college support you more with employability?" All students said similar with "Wanting to be more hands on and be linked with employers to get jobs and businesses to get managerial experience."

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is clear to see that Macclesfield College is doing very well for the students and that the interest of students is at the heart of what they do. It is also clear that they are very strong within the academic sector and they give students a lot of solid learning opportunities. However, it would be very useful if students were kept more up to date with changes that are happening as a result of student voice and more emphasis put onto student representatives so that students can make a visible change and difference to their learning experience.

## **Recommendations**

From analysing the main findings, it has been possible to come up with a selection of recommendations. From these recommendations, it has been possible to advise a selection of suggestions which could be put into place to enforce the recommendations. These are as follows:

### **A - Academic Standards**

Making the inductions shorter would be the first recommendation within the academic standards. This is because there were several comments on the length of time of the induction, such as "*could have been shorter*" and "*all done on one day*". Also, by including more useful information within the inductions such as telling the students about the Harvard Referencing straight away, and also informing students about e-books in the induction, students would be able to take more away from it.

Ensuring every student understands what is expected by having a bigger breakdown of the expectations at the beginning of each unit would be another recommendation, as it means that students are more aware of what is expected and they have more knowledge and possibly more motivation.

Suggestions for this section include going through relevant parts of student handbook at different intervals throughout the year, possibly in reviews. From the previous Student Written Submission, it was found out that with regards to students using the handbook: *“many do not pick up the handbook after the first week of the course, as identified in the focus group”*. (Bond, 2011). This shows that there is still room for improvement with the student handbooks and there is a plethora of information included in there which could support students.

## **B- Learning Opportunities**

There could be more emphasis on ‘student voice’, and the college could tell students what actions they have taken as a result of student voice, showing the students how the college has responded. This is a similar situation with student representatives, the majority of students within the questionnaires said that they didn’t know who their student representative was so it would be beneficial if there was a meeting every perhaps 3 months which took place on behalf of each course, with one student representative from each.

More emphasis could be put on the complaints and appeals procedure at the beginning of the year, either by having a session directly for this procedure or by going over it several times throughout the year. This way, students are more aware of what it is and how to go about it and they won’t feel worried about what to do if there is a case where they want to appeal or complain.

There were quite a lot of comments made about learning resources. A main comment which was made by several students was “more books in library” and others said similar but said that they wanted them specifically about their course. This leads to the recommendation that the College could perhaps invest in a greater variety of books with a deeper knowledge of the subjects which Higher Education students can study at Macclesfield College.

Suggestions for learning opportunities could be for the inductions. Whilst students are in the inductions, more emphasis could be put on the complaints and appeals procedure within the inductions so that students are more aware. Also, with regards to the student voice, there could be more promotions around it, for example of the Higher Education Hub there could be a section showing exactly what changes are being made as a result of student voice. More suggestions on this point are below on the 'Enhancement' section.

### C- Public Information

Before Macclesfield College make any changes to the website, they could send out a preview to a small focus group of students to see if anyone can find anything which is wrong or difficult to understand or to see if there is anything which could be changed so that it is as helpful as possible to the students. There could also be a section on the HE Hub where students can give feedback on the website if they see anything which needs amending, as indicated in figure 1 below.



Figure 1

This is the section where there could be a link that students could click on to make any comments about the website.



## **Enhancement**

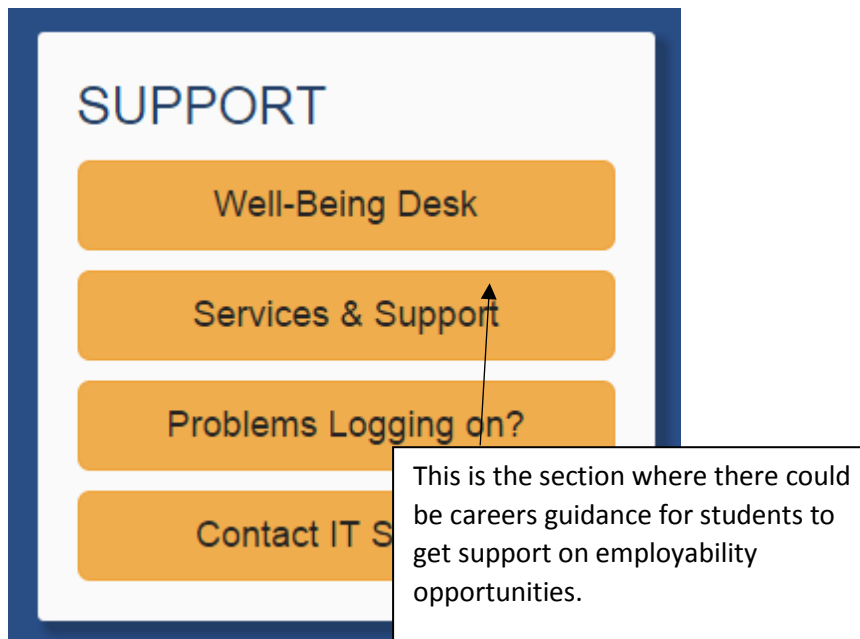
The recommendation for this section also links in with learning opportunities, and what was previously mentioned in the first recommendation of that section. There should be more emphasis on student voice and the college should show the students how they have responded to student voice, so that students are aware of changes and they know that their opinions matter.

Suggestions for this recommendation could include having a section on the wall either of the first floor or second floor of the rotunda in the main building, where all student representatives have their pictures and it can be continuously changed to show what the student voice has done to make an improvement. There could even be a suggestions box where students can post their recommendations on what students feel could be improved.

## **Theme- Student Employability**

With student employability, the feedback from the focus groups of students showed that they would like more guidance when it comes to student employability. Although there is a section on the website which gives students a small amount of information about careers guidance, it doesn't give enough information. From feedback, it would be useful for a section of the website to be fully dedicated to careers guidance and student employability. For example, a selection of local and even national jobs on Moodle which are aimed at students doing different courses, but related to the skills and courses they are doing, as indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2



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