



Established to promote excellence
in university research and teaching

Student Charters

Response to the UUK survey on current practice in HEI/student agreements (I-2010-059)

Submitted: 25 August 2010

Contact: Dr Harriet Dunbar-Goddet (Senior Policy Officer, 1994 Group),
harriet@1994group.co.uk, 0207 872 5595.

The following is the 1994 Group's response to the UUK survey on current practice in HEI/student agreements. For more detailed information please refer to the individual responses of our member institutions.

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, Institute of Education 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 and University of York.

The 1994 Group welcomes the national debate on student charters being led by BIS, UUK and the NUS. A number of our member institutions already implement student charters or are considering doing so, and we refer you to the individual responses of our member institutions to UUK's survey for a view of the success of these schemes and the particular challenges they face.

As a Group we have strongly highlighted the requirement to provide transparent and accurate information, advice and guidance about the experience that students can expect at university. In the modern higher education sector, it is essential that the strength gained from diversity and competition be identified, respected and valued. A regulated market in higher education, with a diverse range of institutions and providers competing within an agreed framework, is the best way to drive up excellence in research, teaching and deliver student satisfaction.

There is no single notion of an excellent student experience, institutions are different, and provide different kinds of student experience. Students deserve clear and accessible information to enable them to understand the choices available.

We believe that student charters, if shaped in the appropriate way, could be a very effective way of providing clarity with regards to the rights and responsibilities of students at university, thereby enabling universities to manage students' expectations both before and

during their studies. A student charter would also enable the clarification of universities' expectations of their staff in terms of ensuring an excellent student experience.

However, we believe a student charter should not become a legalistic or contractual 'bill of rights' or series of 'service level agreements'. Rather, it should be an overarching expression of a balance of rights and responsibilities between an institution's students and staff, which highlights that the student is an active partner, not a passive consumer, of higher education. As part of this partnership it would be of key importance that students are strongly involved in the design, monitoring and review of these charters.

In our response to Lord Browne's Review, we recommended that a sector-owned student charter should be investigated, setting out a package of minimum standards a student might expect from a university experience. This would be an entirely voluntary document and not subject to review or examination by any national body. Above this set of minimum standards different institutions would then have the flexibility to focus as appropriate on particular aspects of their own students' experiences.

Key considerations regarding how student charters would be shaped are whether they would apply to all students (e.g. International and postgraduate as well as Home undergraduates), whether there would be any disadvantages or unintended consequences, and whether there would be any legal implications attached.

As we also informed Lord Browne, the Group is currently working to produce a high-quality, online resource for potential students, and their parents and families, which will signpost to various sources of information to give applicants an understanding of the varying nature of the education that is offered to them by different institutions. We envisage that this resource will be a useful way for institutions to communicate the information contained in their student charters.