

Meeting with BA Politics and History and Politics students about the closure of their programme

Students in attendance: 11

Lily Rumsey (LSU President)

Roger Webster (Dean of Faculty: Media, Arts and Social Science)

Liz Sperling (Academic Manager: School of Humanities and Social Science)

Roger gave apologies Margaret Edwards (Director of School of Humanities and Social Science who was ill.

Roger stated that, for students on the programmes in question, he had made sure that all students were written to, with key questions on-line for students to access. He outlined reasons for this:

- Recruitment low for a number of years
- Funding arrangements that that the programmes have been subsidised for years by other courses
- The courses were therefore unsustainable

With actual and soon-to-be-announced Government cuts and the Browne Review into Higher Education funding, LJMU had to take action and cut 10% from all budgets at Easter and plan for a further 25% to 35% in October. Part of this cost-saving involved voluntary redundancies, which some of the Politics team had applied for and been accepted. There was no ability to re-recruit after staff had left but a new member of staff had been appointed as a replacement for a staff member who had left but not been made redundant.

Roger had made the decision to close the programme this year, instead of next year as anticipated, in order to concentrate resources on level two and three students. This will allow a sensible student/staff ratio. Roger had no desire to close the programme but external influences (government cuts) had made it necessary.

Liz Sperling said that there should be no issues with continuing the quality of the programme as the great staff team were in place and all modules that had enough interest to run at the end of last year will run (some won't, but this is due to lack of interest and not due to the closure of the programme).

Students had some questions:

1. Does this mean that I won't be able to do a postgraduate degree at LJMU?

LJMU don't do MA Politics anyway but with 2:1 should be fine for other Universities. There are still options for other MA/MRes programmes and the Faculty was just beginning an MA in Human Rights.

2. Although students accepted course closure (reluctantly), is there going to be any

Roger apologised for the bad time of year, but the Emergency Coalition budget had forced his hand. He said that communication had included talking to students still in Liverpool, arranging an open question session, talking the Liverpool Student's Union, writing to every student and creating an on-line FAQ. Roger had no idea how press received news of the closures and announced them in advance, but he regretted this.

In response to a comment, Roger confirmed that there was no issue with the programme's performance – recruitment was the major problem that couldn't be solved.

3. Why single out courses with low student/staff ratios for closure rather than over-subscribed programmes with lower quality experience? –

Roger agreed that a low student/staff ratio across the board would be ideal, but that higher education had to deal with the world as it is – cuts and lower investment meant that the Faculty had to make a closure to preserve and improve every other students' student experience.

Liz stated that continuing students will continue to have small groups – there would be no reduction while the courses were running.

4. What about future recruits? Would this mean poor or no education for more people?

Liz said that delivery across the School is good. Staff are accessible and great. Cuts are, however, national and LJMU could not save education for more students in the face of these reductions.

5. Will the VC lead by example and put cuts/money saving in at the senior level? Why should courses be cut and not other admin costs?

There have been, and will be, redundancies/freezes/cuts at senior level – one example is that Roger is now the Dean of two Faculties and is leading them through a merger. Roger (and other Deans) are arguing strongly that academic support must be preserved over admin – you can't have a University without Professors!

Roger confirmed that buildings aren't paid for from the same budget, so cutting buildings would be counterproductive (because it would negatively impact recruitment but not save any money from operating budgets)

6. What if people repeat/take sandwich years/illness – or generally require continuation?

The Politics modules are still 'on the books'. Modules will still be available – or similar requisite. Within a reasonable timeframe, a similar programme could be put together for students – not identical but equivalent if necessary: every situation like this would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis

Liz used example from previous years about a student who took a sabbatical whose course has closed and a programme has been put together. The Faculty aren't unfamiliar with courses winding-down and coping with what happens.

7. Will be Vice-Chancellor apologise for the poor and impersonal communication to students?

Lily said that she would raise this with the Vice-Chancellor that afternoon and push for an apology.

Any further details or questions or comments on whether the Faculty is keeping quality high can be sent though Paul Boyham, the Faculty's independent Student Voice Co-ordinator at p.r.boyham@2008.ljmu.ac.uk