

Report on the UKCLE National Law Students Forum 2010

From the 3-4th November the National Law Students Forum 2010 was held in Manchester. This was a pilot event where law student representatives from 20 universities in England were brought together to discuss how students can more effectively contribute to their learning process.

The conference consisted of various talks by guest speakers and workshops where the participants had the opportunity to share their experiences. In this report I have summarised the discussions for the benefit of the SOAS Law School.

The United Kingdom's Centre for Legal Education works to better legal education in the country in a variety of ways. To learn more about the UKCLE, visit their webpage [<http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/>]. You may also join the National Law Student Forum Group on Facebook where continuous discussions on how students participation is taking place.



All law school representatives of 2010.



Effective representation

Ant Bagshaw, representative of the National Union of Students [NUS] gave an introductory talk on effective representation which was a centre theme of the conference.

The selection process and composition of student representatives greatly determines what interests are represented and what issues raised in consultative meetings.

Different universities adopt different selection strategies. Various voting systems were explained and some schools use online devices to increase people's ability to vote. The composition of representatives did also vary. Some universities have for example representatives for mature, part-time and overseas students.

At SOAS there seems to have been some unclarity as to how and whose responsibility it was to carry out the selection process this year. By November the second year representatives had yet not been selected. Students from other years have also expressed that there is lack of information as to who their representatives are and how one can contact them.

At SOAS the composition of representatives is based on having two representatives of each year of the undergraduate year. This may also be a point of discussion with respect to effective representation.

On the right side I have attached the SOAS Law School student profile of 2010. This is just general data of the composition of students, but may be valuable information for all student representatives in identify issues, planning events and for evaluating whether effective representation is present at our school.

Likewise may it also be of interest to review the NSS statistics [below] over the last years. Although it is not conclusive, that data shows that the general satisfaction at SOAS Law School is very good and has increased over the last 5 years.

SOAS Law School: Student Profile 2010

More detailed information about student numbers	
Registered students	240
Male : Female	34:66
% Mature	23%
% Overseas	41%
Student breakdown information for all study levels	
% Full time	91%
% Part time	9%
Student breakdown information for all study modes	
% First degree	49%
% Other undergrad	0%
% Postgrad	51%



Communication & Negotiation

The second half of the conference was focused on effective communication as an element of effective representation.

A communication and negotiation skills workshop was held by Rebecca Huxley-Binns, Law Teacher of the Year Winner 2010. This was tailored for student representatives in consultative meetings with staff.

Communication with students

As a representor it is important to be aware of the interests of ones 'clients'. Some participants explained that they often make use of online questionnaires and other means to have the students voices. This is of course to assure that the true interests are represented, but also to be able to provide supporting evidence in meetings.

As all students cannot partake in the consultative meetings, it is imperative that there are reports made available to anyone of the issues raised and decisions taken. It is also highly beneficial to have follow up reports on the measures taken to communicate to the student body that issues are in fact dealt with. This in effect also enhances students trust in the existing system.

Communication with staff

The guest speaker strongly suggested student representatives to use techniques that focus on solutions and constructive criticism. She explained that most often student representatives lack in providing solution and having alternatives in mind when negotiating with staff. It was therefore suggested that student representatives should encourage students not only to raise issues, but to suggest solutions.

She further emphasised the importance of self-awareness and of being conscious of what kind of strategy one adopts in discussion and what effects it has on other parties. The communication and negotiation skills workshops held I believe were very beneficial for all participants. Similar workshops may be useful to conduct at SOAS for all student representatives. It may also be an idea to invite all students to partake as these are skills that may be of great value in their future careers. The Law Society or Bar Society may like to investigate whether such an event could be possible.



Stickers used to prioritise issues.

How is student representation working at SOAS?

This forum was an opportunity for the student representatives to meet on a national level to get insight into how student representation operates at other schools across the country. With this knowledge it is hoped that we can reflect on student representation at SOAS Law School.

Naturally, there is no conclusive answer as to how well we are doing. SOAS aims to have two student representatives for each year, a Law Society, Bar Society and consultative meetings with staff throughout the year. Some schools do not have these institutions and forums, whilst others have much more complex structures.

Most issues that have been raised at our school are not unique, but are present at many other schools over the country. Lack of resources in the library, concerns about referees and assessment methods are some of the common issues. The urgency of these issues did of course however differ. The need for a better functioning selection process of student representatives was one issue more relevant to SOAS than to other universities present.

If you have thoughts about student representation at the SOAS Law School or would like to know more about the National Law Student Forum contact me, Elin Felicia Kyrk. [251787@soas.ac.uk]

Brainstorming of solutions to commonly shared problems at law schools across the country.



National Student Survey: SOAS [2005-2010]

Law 2005-2010					
	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08	2006-07	2005-06
The teaching on my course	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.1
1. Staff are good at explaining things.	4.3	4.2	4.2	4.2	3.9
2. Staff have made the subject interesting.	4.3	4.1	4	3.9	4.1
3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.1	4
4. The course is intellectually stimulating.	4.4	4.5	4.3	4.1	4.3
Assessment and feedback	3.7	3.8	3.4	3.4	3.4
5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.	3.8	3.8	3.4	3.4	3
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.	3.9	3.9	3.7	4	3.7
7. Feedback on my work has been prompt.	3.4	3.8	3.5	3	3.7
8. I have received detailed comments on my work.	3.8	3.7	3.2	3.3	3.7
9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.	3.7	3.7	3.3	3.3	3.2
Academic support	4	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.4
10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.5
11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.	4.2	4	3.8	3.9	3.6
12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.	4	3.8	3.4	3.3	3.2
Organisation and management	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.7	3.6
13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.	4	4	4.1	3.7	3.8
14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.	4	4.1	4.1	3.6	3.3
15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly.	3.7	4	4.1	3.8	3.5
Learning resources	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.6	3.3
16. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.4	3.1
17. I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to.	4.3	4.2	4	3.8	3.4
18. I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to.	4	4.2	3.6	3.6	3.3
Personal development	4.3	4.2	3.9	4.1	4
19. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.	4.3	4.1	3.8	4	4.1
20. My communication skills have improved.	4.3	4.5	4	4.2	4.1
21. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.	4.2	4.1	4	4.2	4
Overall Satisfaction	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.1	4
Response rate (%)	62	79	57	51	50

provided by the Academic Development Directorate [17th November, 2010]
 see the National Student Survey's webpage for more information [<http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>]