**Transcript for Academic Vice President Question Time panel debate**

**Neil-** Hello and welcome another of our Students’ Union election panel debates. We are joined for this debate by some of the candidates for the Academic VP full time position on the Executive Committee. They are going to be standing in the elections coming up at the beginning of April and they are going to introduce themselves to you now.

**Ellen**- I’m Ellen Marshall

**Colin-** I’m Colin Laing

**Luke-** I’m Luke Hill

**Amanish-** I’m Amanish Lohan

**Neil-** And we have got some questions to ask them and they are all going to get a chance to respond to those. So the first question, we will start with Ellen on the end, with an impending rise in tuition fees it is arguable that now more than ever before students are becoming consumers in education. What will you do to ensure that every student at the University of Wolverhampton is getting their monies’ worth from their course?

**Ellen-** I think that the higher education academy at the minute, are almost making it compulsory that all institutions are having student charters, that is something that they are proposing to do, which I think is a brilliant idea. It is a brilliant way of letting student know what is expected of them at the time of university, what they are expecting to receive in their education and how they are meant to be within this institution, like how they are meant to act. I think if anything that’s going to be one of the key things the students know what they are getting for their money and they are aware of that before they come to university so they are prepared on paying this amount of money to go to this institution and I'm going to get this from it. I think that the guidelines are a lot more clearer then.

**Neil-** Same question to Colin

**Colin**- I would say that whilst in the Student Union Council we have discussed the student charter and we have discussed implementing it and how we are going to go about that and that we will work on in the future, I think what we also need to look at is how the University is providing things because specifically within Wolverhampton what’s happened at the moment is with how they have re-jiggled the programme, the undergraduate programme, it seems to me from the impression that I've got that they’ve not actually taken any of the lesson from any of the teething problems that they’ve had and when it’s come to, now that they are restructuring the post graduate programme, they have not taken any of the lessons are still doing exactly the same so whilst indeed we need to look at the student charter and still what the students are expected of, I still that there is also a point at which that the University need to be made aware and need to be held to account and make sure that they are upholding their side of the bargain.

**Neil-** Thank-you Luke how will you ensure that students are getting value for money from their course?

**Luke-** I think I’ll probably look at a slightly different slant in that some of the committees that I sit on, such as student affairs committees, they have been talking about not only how the programme has been restructured but almost been re-tailored to what they consider to be business wide request from industry. One of the things which a lot of universities are implementing, and Wolverhampton haven’t done yet, is not only making sure that the programme is very transparent in what you will be doing over the three years but listing certain traits. For instance contact hours that is something that stereotypically that this university has shied away from, in my opinion it is something that you can only shy away from for so long. I think that not only detailing contact hours but detailing the type of contact hours you get, whether that be lectures, seminars or even one-to-one tuition, I think that is something that is pivotal. Not only that it does tie into the student charter because the QAA are looking to introduce this sort of thing across universities worldwide, but it is something that will take time and I think, if we can get in there early and publish our course to not only have a certain amount of contact time but also say what we as a university are doing is ahead of schedule we are looking to advertise our university. It is just going to make the university not only more appealing but a much better place to work for both students and lecturers alike.

**Neil-** Amanish the same question to you.

**Amanish-** What I firstly would do is give a new student a very clear picture of what they are going to have in the coming three years of whatever their course is. The first thing is to, you know when they give their assignments in, it’s when they give the feedback , because most of the students when they come to the university even in their final year they are not getting the feedback from the professors its ready from the professor but the student don’t come to collect it and later on they are complaining well my grades and everything that they haven’t got the grades which they have wanted. First my main priority is to ask the students to collect their feedback on time because it really improves a lot to help student with their grades later on. The second thing is the module thing has change from last year from 15 to 20 and the modules have come down from 4-3 so the international students coming in or even the home students who don’t have the perfect idea of what’s going on I would like to just let them know exactly what’s going on and what they are going to be studying for three years, where to get the actual help in the course from or where/who to contact exactly, because these are much small things to discuss but there are many, many, many students who still don’t have an idea of where to go to when such things come up in their course. I want to keep it simple.

**Neil-** Ok onto our second question and we will start with your self Colin. Do you think that the University is justified in discontinuing courses with insufficient numbers of students?

**Colin-** If they do it in a staggered and phased way yes. I know that I’ve had friends in fact I'm on a course whereby the, where some of the modules have been restructured and some of the modules, in fact even though I am a second year Business Finance student I am doing a third year module this year because it doesn’t actually tie in and the numbers just weren’t there for the second year module to go ahead. So with the number of cuts that have come through and the funding that universities are facing I do think that as long as it is done and it is implemented in a structured way, that isn’t going to impinge students and isn’t going to affect the student’s experience within the university then, yes I don’t see that, that is necessarily a bad thing because that then allows that money to then be re-distributed to other courses that may well benefit from that extra funding.

**Neil-** Luke?

**Luke-** I think that no matter which way you cut at it, we are in a recession cuts are going to be have to be made so I think again I am going to have to agree with Colin, cuts do have to be made. I think I would also agree with the fact that they do need to be staggered but I think that they do need to be staggered a slightly different way, in that It is not necessarily the course which don’t have the numbers on because sometimes a course might experience a slight blip for one year and not have enough students. I mean I have experienced students who have had their courses discontinued and they have been a year 2 or 3 student and they have had to re-apply through UCAS and the University and that is something which needs to be not only avoided but almost, you know, looked down upon because one thing that is important is that whilst we do make these cut, which are necessary I must say, they must be made in a way which not only ensures that students don’t get disadvantaged from their courses but it also mustn’t disadvantage students from wanting to come to university. For instance a lot of courses are starting to put higher caps on the entrance and as soon as you put those higher caps on and you’re cutting courses it is just going to disenfranchise students and make them less able to seek the information that they need to come to university. So I think that if these cuts are made they need to be made in a staggered way that helps the university achieve those caps, achieve those higher caps so that maxing out the courses, but at the same time it must make sure that current students don’t get disenfranchised.

**Neil-** Amanish?

**Amanish-** Yeah, to a certain extent the university is quite justified in you know cutting out the courses because if you have a certain course where like there are 10 students for example coming over and they have got a staff of 50 people, the university is paying those as well and it’s just for a limited number of students and the course is like its limited in the university not many places as well and they are studying in this university, even then the university has to pay too much for the staff for the facilities going to those students and they aren’t getting anything out of it. Rather than that, as Colin mentioned earlier, that money could be channelled to other things as well, even now the university is providing these students with so much facilities, there’s computers free services everything else, and it is already such a large family of students around and if this university think there are a couple of courses which could be discontinued to benefit other students. I would also agree with Luke in saying that if someone is starting a course they should be allowed to finish the course because it really hampers their career forward, because if they are finishing the course in 3 years it would take them 4 or 5 to finish their course, so yeah.

**Neil-** Ellen?

**Ellen-** I pretty much agree with everybody else I mean it is something that you know inevitable might happen and I think that with, I think as long as the university are looking at every single option before they make that decision as well I think that is vital because it might be the case that, that course can, like, a few of the modules can be merged into another course perhaps, so I think that all routes need to be looked at before they make that final decision to cut them. I think that current students that are on that course shouldn’t suffer from cut of their facilities or cuts of their contact time, cuts in staff members or anything like that. So I think as long as the students that are currently on that course can progress and all options have been looked at then it is something that will sadly have to happen.

**Neil-** Anyone have anything else to add?

**Colin-** I would say that on the back of what Ellen just said about the course being looked at, I would say, certainly from a Business course perspective, that this year what’s happened is with the learning works and the under grad with the changing of the 15 to 20 credit modules, is that I know the principle lecturer in the business school and I certainly imagine it’s the same within other schools, they’ve already done that where there’s modules that they have seen where there’s correlation between them where they can actually work and where they can merge. So whilst yes I agree there shouldn’t be any student learning impact from this and certainly I agree with everybody I think we are pretty much unanimous on the fact that you know the student experience shouldn’t be affected and if people start a course basically, I signed up at Wolverhampton university to do that course they should be entitled to finish that course, however from the perspective of the merging and looking of the modules I would say that over the development of the learning works I’d say a significant number of the schools have already looked at that.

**Luke-** I think one of the key things as well we will look at the merging aspect is that this must be done very, very, very stringently because what a lot of students especially in STech are finding given that the school itself has merged, is that a lot of the long thin modules are not only being combined with other subjects which are similar but other subjects which are in fact not similar. One of the problems is that like Colin has said, if you sign up to Wolverhampton University you want you want to finish that. I want to extend what Colin’s said and make that sentence a bit longer and say, if you sign up to Wolverhampton University to do your course you should be allowed to finish the university doing your course. That is something which I think the university are going to soon come un-stuck with in that they need to make sure that whilst they do allow students to do these merged modules and somehow finish their course the best they can, they must also very, very, very carefully must watch that students aren’t suddenly going through a Maths course to a Computing course. Or from a Business course to a Finance course those are completely different things and you’ve go to make sure that if you are merging modules, it’s done very, very carefully. So that not only to confuse the courses because a lot of courses are accredited, I know from personal experience the computing course has recently gone under some very, very, very strict management problems because they have not met the criteria from the British Computing Society. That will only happen more and more whilst these mergers are happening willy nilly, these mergers must be very strictly controlled and very well managed.

**Ellen-** These merges shouldn’t be compromise to any of the students, if anything, if the merge is going to be beneficial to a student then I agree that it should go ahead and that is what I mean by looking at the options if that is a possibility where it can benefit a student then the university should do that, rather than just completely like, pushing that module to the side.

**Neil-** so our 3rd question in this debate, starting with Luke is, is plagiarism always intentional?

**Luke-** I think it is a very interesting subject plagiarism and I think it is something which can be very easily defined into you’ll have plagiarism in group work and you’ll have plagiarism in single work and I think it is very clear that before you even start talking about plagiarism it must be very, very explicitly stated what constitutes plagiarism within group work and what constitutes plagiarism within individual work. I think for group work it is a lot easier for 2 particular reasons, firstly that there is not as much group work as there is individual work on the whole in most university courses but the second issue is that when you are working in a group you’ll think about sharing ideas, you’ll think about working within a team and then suddenly you’ll think “oh that team is doing something different, why are they doing it different?” You’ll have a chat and so on and so forth so I think a lot of the time within group work I think plagiarism is very unintentional. I have seen a lot of instances with plagiarism where people have gone, they’ve said to the lecturer or they have said to the committee that has been formed “yes it was unintentional, I didn’t realise I was doing it.” I’d probably take more of a devil’s advocate on the individuals point and say my personal opinion is that is you are plagiarising in individual work, 9 times out of 10 you know that you are plagiarising. It is probably something that will perhaps set me apart from the rest of the panel, but I think that the only real instance that you will have where people are plagiarising and are unaware of it is through writing essays or dissertations and doing referencing and those are the type of students that tend to come unstuck and it generally on the whole is students which have not maybe had as much experience at essay writing. Myself, I haven’t done a lot of essay writing for the last 5 years I had a been to the open seminars that the university provided open lectures on the learning and information services on how to reference and what constitutes plagiarism, these are fully available. So probably just to round off I would say that I think on the whole group coursework plagiarism issue is not even really an issue it is just something which perhaps just needs a friendly word and a bit of advice. I think on the individual point of view I think there perhaps needs to be much harsher, not just regulations but warnings, this is serious. At school if you ever had issues where you are copying of something you might get a slap on wrist, at university it is a very serious issue because not only is it do to with the changes in your content, you might suddenly go from a B to and A it is also to do with the copyrighting issue, if you are copying something which someone has paid for or something that someone has produced and sold in a book then you are not allowed to legally use that information without referencing it. So I would say that on the whole individual plagiarism is something which usually is quite intentional.

**Neil-** Amanish is plagiarism always intentional?

**Amanish**- Well, I would say it depends a lot on the time you’ve been at the University because when you first come first to University, for example international students, the place where I come from I know we’re are not explained these things before we come to University. So if we are coming directly out of school from an international country and you have no idea what plagiarism and collusion is but the University does do study skills and everything to let you know what plagiarism is and you know it. So if it is in the first year, I’m talking about an individual and if it is in the first year, a first assignment and they have copied something I would say it may be intentional and it may be unintentional because the idea is still not clear, as you progress towards your second year or your final year I would rather say that the person that is copying from a book or the internet knows, even if you are changing a sentence in someway inside you know that you are copying it and they have a very clear picture that it is intentional plagiarism. I agree with Luke again that 9 out of 10 persons know that it is intentional as you progress in your course forward.

**Neil-** And Ellen?

**Ellen-** Honestly my answer would be no, I don’t think it’s always intentional and the reason for this is, I have this year alone represented 25 students in academic misconduct cases and I would say at least 20 of them were plagiarism cases. It is apparent that a lot of these students are summarising not necessarily knowing that putting the words from a book into a different context isn’t allowed, isn’t acceptable, they don’t understand that as being plagiarism. It might be that they have forgotten to put quotation marks around a piece of work but they have referenced it in their bibliography, that’s still plagiarism, if it is not clear. But I don’t think the intent was necessarily there for students to be like ‘oh I’m going to go out and copy this’ it is just perhaps a little bit of carelessness when its come to doing that piece of work. If we’re talking about collusion then that’s a different matter a lot of students don’t realise about group work and working together and the consequences of having similar work to another student and that is something I feel really strongly about, getting the message out there about the penalties that are in place. I think the University and the way their penalty structure is set at the moment suggests that it isn’t always intentional. It is a lower penalty for first year students, for first time offences and it is a more strict penalty for master students, post grad students, and for students in the second and third years at University.

**Neil-** Colin, plagiarism, always intentional?

**Colin-** No, for the most part I agree with what all the panellist say to a lesser or greater extent . When it comes to individual work, I think we’re all, group work, I think we’re all agreed that it isn’t necessarily always intentional and as Alan said, ops, Ellen said, when it comes to collusion again, I think what essentially needs to happen is that there needs more clarity from both the University, and this is where the SU can help, where by you can just explain, because the thing is during Freshers week and re-Freshers week it is exactly the same, is that you have all kinds of everything thrown at you, the majority of which you just discard and you don’t remember and because everything is there in that first week and that’s just it and its just left alone assuming that you understood it. I think what possibly needs to happen which is something I’ve written in my manifesto, I did it towards international students but again it is something the SU are currently running and can be rolled out but is to organise regular workshops and make sure students are aware of these work shops and make sure the students know that they can attend, even drop it into lectures at staggered points through out the year. But I don’t necessarily think that plagiarism is always intentional because individuals, as Ellen said, don’t realise that by jiggering stuff around not referencing properly I think the University has the right idea that penalties are less for the first year undergrad and as you move up get more severe because again as Amanish said the fact is If you are new to University where as if you were doing it at GCSE or A level, what ever, the fact is the penalties are less because less because there is less ramifications. I do, no, it’s not always intentional but I think that there is a lot that is in place its just a case of getting it out there so students are aware and revisiting it throughout the year rather than just having it at isolated points at Freshers and re-Freshers.

**Neil**- One final question for this debate, slightly changing the mood, Amanish. If you had a super power which super power would you have and why?

**Amanish-** Tough one. I’m a bit blank right now. Do you need an answer regarding this position?

**Neil-** Just in general and life!

**Amanish-** Well I would love to stop time if I had a super power because the world is running too fast right now so I could have a little bit of peace time in the middle of all this rush hour. I would also love to rewind time because some of the mistakes I’ve made in my life I would love to correct them then maybe life would have been something else right now.

**Neil-** And Ellen, a super power?

**Ellen-** I am going to go for pure cheese right now. My super power would be a combination of super sonic hearing, super sonic mind processing, and super sonic relaying information in a positive way that achieves results. So I can listen to all the students and all their problems and relay it back out there. That was so cheesy, if I was being deadly honest I’d want to be invisible but that’s not a cheesy answer is it?

**Neil-** And Colin, super power?

**Colin**: Oh, I’m about to out-cheese Ellen, I think my super power would have to be the power of understanding because there is just so much that is all to do with intolerance and not understanding each other and all I would like is to just be able to speak to people, get them to understand that we don’t all have to be the same and we can all be a little bit different and we can celebrate that and lets just stop arguing about it all and lets all be nice and light and fluffy.

**Neil-** And Luke.

**Luke-** I’m gonna go for the easy one and have a magic wand, but mine would be a magic wand with a difference. For anyone who is a bit of a movie buff and would like to see the movie ‘click’ again, you’ve gotta have that, Adam Sandler pressing the buttons, sorted. I’d be able to speed up time, I’d be able to slow down time and not only that I could just press a button and the shelf would stack itself. I could sit in the library read through 10 books get all the information I need and then the buttons gone all the books are stacked I could learn at a much quicker pace, and have much more time at Uni to socialise and have more fun.

**Neil-** Thank you for watching this panel debate as part of the Students’ Union elections. Make sure you’ve shared your details with us online through the website and through e:Vision and that you’re registered to vote. Please do vote between the 4th and 7th April at the website [www.wolvesunion.org](http://www.wolvesunion.org)