





# **Effective Students' Association Engagement with Part-time Students**

**December 2010**



Glasgow Caledonian University  
Students' Association

Scottish Charity No. SC022887

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Project Rationale

Data on students' perceptions and use of the Students' Association has been collected from GCU students via two university surveys. The New2GCU survey gathers data from all new students at the university and specific questions about the Students' Association are included. In 2010 the Students' Association ran its own survey for the first time and was targeted at all students to find out their awareness and experience of using their facilities and services. Findings from the survey suggest that part-time students do not believe that the Students' Association can offer them anything due to their part-time status. Further to this, there has been a great deal of anecdotal evidence collected by members of staff within the Students' Association working with part-time students who have engaged with or enquired about activities and services which supports this position. The largest contributing reason for this is that there is a belief that the services provided will be aimed either exclusively or predominantly at 'traditional' students.

## 1.2 Research aims and objectives

As a result of these findings, the Students' Association want to explore this perception further. The aim of this project is to undertake research into how the Students' Association can better promote its services to part-time students and where necessary change them or introduce new services by answering the following question:

- Do part-time students believe that the services and activities offered by the Students' Association meet their needs and are of interest to them?

If so, a further aim of the research is to find out why they do not currently engage to the same extent as full time students and if not, to find out what is it that part-time students require in terms of services and activities from their Students' Association.

Knowing more about how part-time students engage will allow the Students' Association to tailor their pre-entry communications and gain greater engagement through levels of participation in activities and the volume of service usage. All of which helps bring these students deeper into the Students' Association and University community. Through this project, the Students' Association will be better placed to market its services to part-time students and will be given the opportunity to hear the part-time student voice allowing for further consideration of service design and implementation.

## 1.3 Part-time students in Higher Education

**1.31** Part-time students have long been recognised as a significant segment of the HE student population, accounting for approximately 40 per cent of all students in the UK. Recent findings indicate that part-time students are typically mature and more likely to be female (Universities UK, 2010) and around a third are already graduates (Callendar et al., 2006). However this section of the student population is a diverse group and as such there is not a 'typical' part-time student (King, 2008).

- 1.32** Research suggests that employment and family responsibilities are reasons why many students opt to study part-time (King, 2008; Yorke and Longden, 2008). With academic work fitting around other commitments (Attwood, 2010) part-time students will often make pragmatic decisions about choice of study (King, 2008). It is also recognised that studying on a part-time basis is a juggling act with students trying to fit this into lives that are already busy with other activities (Callendar and Feldman, 2009).
- 1.33** Participation in student life is often difficult for part-time students with family responsibilities and long commutes to university (Callendar and Feldman, 2009). Due to time constraints, participation will typically involve class attendance rather than spending time accessing services and facilities (Kember et al., 2001). Also the arrangements of part-time study make it difficult for students to engage with student life as many study in the evening or at weekends when university services or extra-curricular activities are not always available (King, 2008). Accessing resources and facilities is also a concern as part-time students are often competing against full-time students, for example when borrowing library resources (Kember et al., 2001).
- 1.34** Research also indicates that part-time students do not always identify themselves as a 'student', particularly when studying is seen as part of their job or other roles take priority and as a result do not feel excluded from the mainstream student life (Schuller et al., 1999). It has also been reported that part-time students do not rely on university services and facilities in the same way that full-time students do. Many will have alternative support networks at home or in work as well as not having the time to access university services (Thomas et al., 2002).
- 1.35** Studies that have explored the experiences of part-time students in Higher Education have focused on aspects related to teaching, the study process, assessment and feedback and academic support (Yorke and Longden, 2008) or the challenges to fully participate due to work and home commitments (Callendar et al., 2006). If part-time students experience difficulty in finding the time to participate fully in their course then it is understandable that any additional involvement in university life would inevitably be a challenge. In particular, a study found that only 29 per cent of part-time students reported that they used the Students' Union<sup>1</sup> occasionally or frequently, with this service appearing 7<sup>th</sup> on the list of 11 services detailed in the survey. The type of services most used included online resources, library and IT facilities and catering (Callendar et al., 2006).
- 1.36** A recent study for the HEFCE focused on student engagement in relation to institutional and Student Union processes and practices. The report suggests that the HE sector could work on developing student representation practices that 'work' for part-time students and sharing those practices as students experience additional commitments to study such as paid employment and family responsibilities. This study found that it was difficult to encourage students to put themselves forward as possible student representatives. Student Unions reported that student apathy and other priorities outside of studying and university life were the most common reasons for this (Little et al., 2009).
- 1.37** Although there is greater awareness of the study experience of part-time students, there is still limited knowledge about their experiences of non-academic activities and broader engagement in university life.

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<sup>1</sup> In Scotland a Students' Union is known as a Students' Association

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research methods and process

The findings from the 2010 Students' Association survey suggested that more in-depth data collection was required. Open-ended questions were added to the survey as well as conducting focus groups with a selection of part-time students.

Part-time students were contacted via programme leaders on different degree courses across all schools at GCU. The researcher attended lectures to explain the study and requested participation by either completing the survey and/or attending a focus group.

### 2.2 Sample

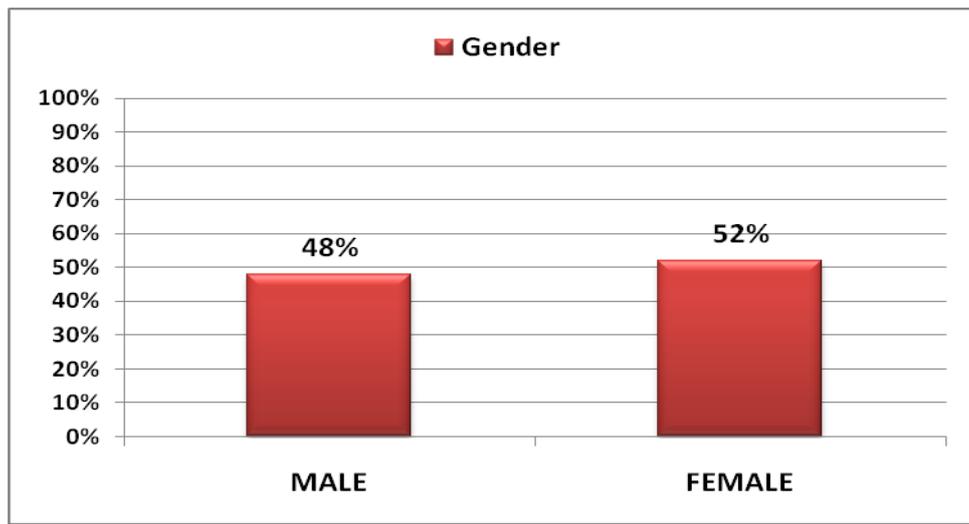
243 questionnaires were distributed across 12 different degree programmes. 138 questionnaires were returned generating a response rate of 57 per cent. Where lecturers suggested emailing the questionnaire to students, an electronic version was sent out to approximately 235 students across three different degree programmes. Five questionnaires were returned via this approach, generating a very low response rate of two per cent. In total 143 questionnaires were completed.

Due to time constraints amongst part-time students, those on day release with an hour lunch break were contacted for the focus group participation. Five lectures were attended where approximately 70 students were asked if they would like to contribute to the discussions and from this three focus groups were set up with the aim of involving approximately 25 students. In total 15 students were available to participate in discussions: a focus group of 11 students, a small discussion group with three students and an interview with one student.

### 3. PART-TIME STUDENTS AT GCU

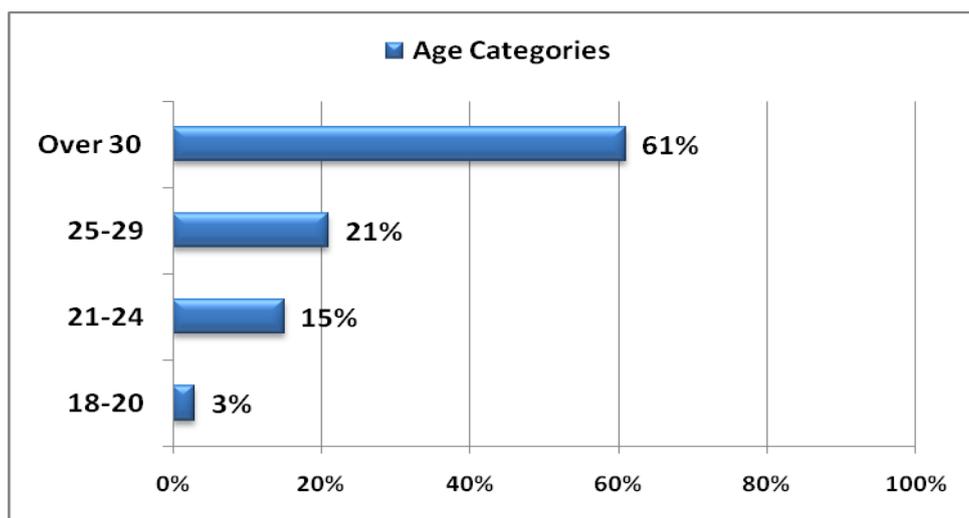
At the time of the analysis in September 2010 there were 4386 part-time students at the university. This is approximately 25 per cent of the total student population at the university. There is a fairly even mix of male and female part-time students, although a slightly higher percentage (52 per cent) of females.

Figure 1: Gender



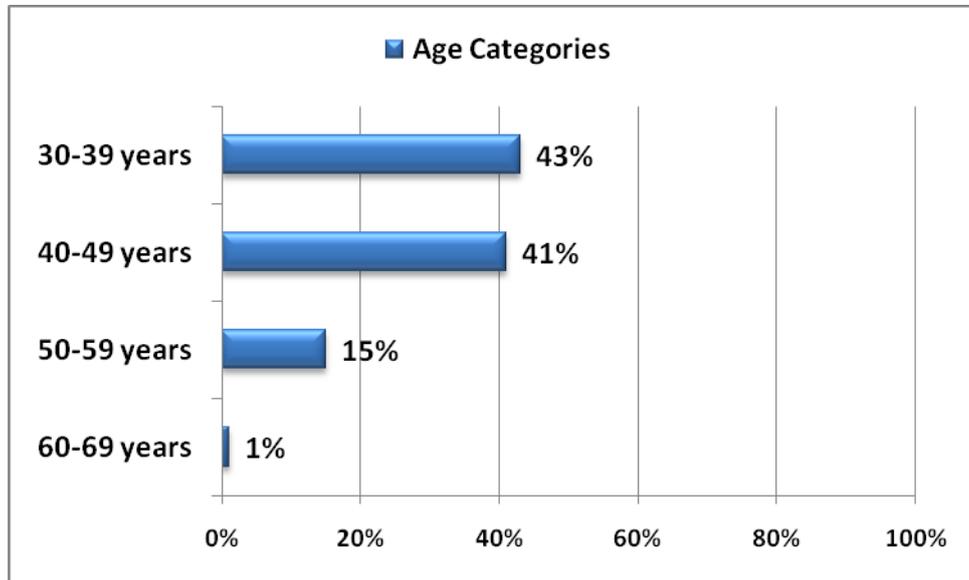
In terms of the age range, part-time student's minimum age is 18 years old and the maximum age is 67 years old. The mean age is 35 years. Student's age is also categorised (see Figure 2) with the majority of students aged 30 years and over (61 per cent) with the smallest age category being 18-20 years (3 per cent).

Figure 2: Age categories



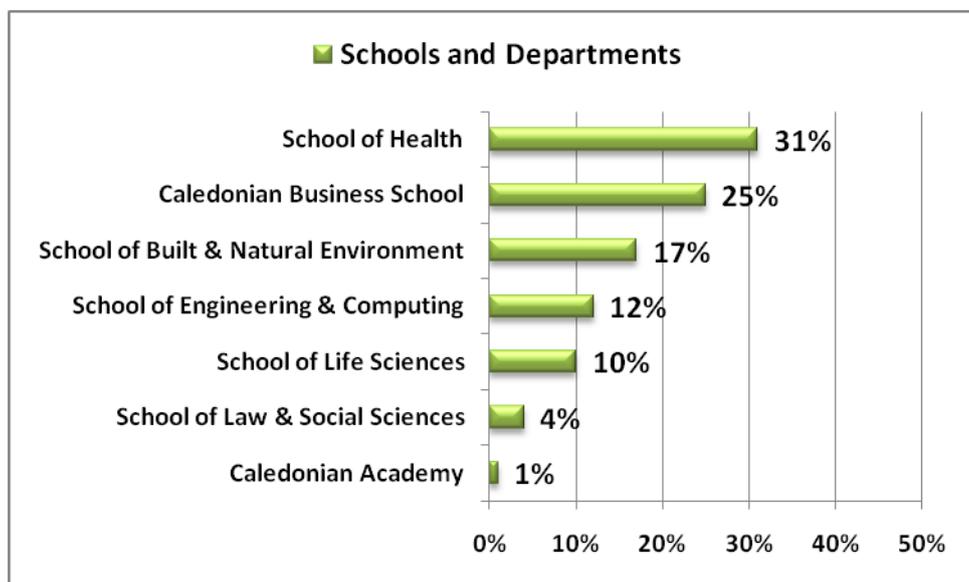
As a large percentage of students are aged 30 and over it was interesting to explore a further age breakdown of this group. Figure 3 presents this information and the findings indicate that of the 2680 students aged over 30 the majority of students (84 per cent) are between the ages of 30 and 49 years of age.

**Figure 3: Over 30 by age categories**



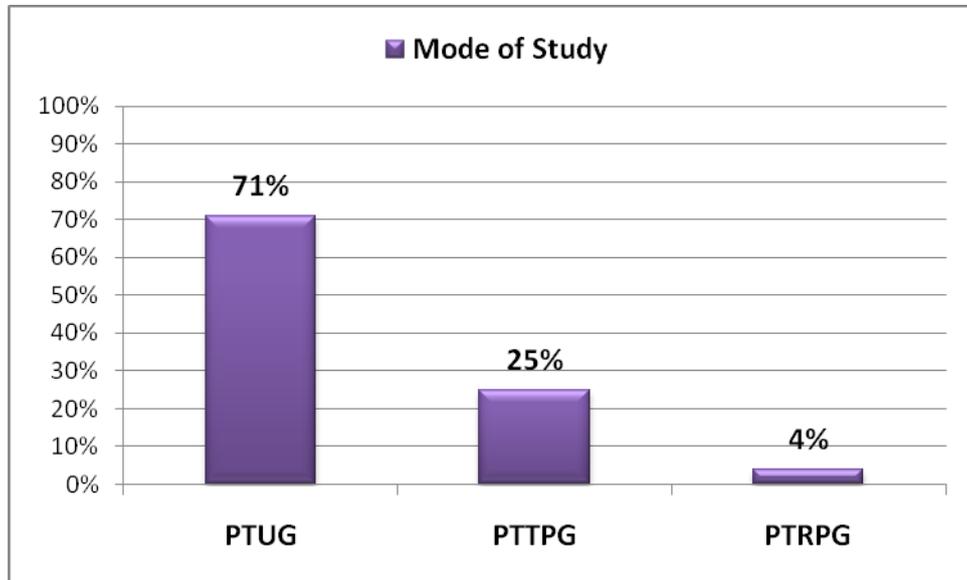
As some part-time students are studying postgraduate degrees by research they may be employed by the university and therefore not always based in one of the schools. The following information in Figure 4 details schools and additional departments that students may be based in. Three students are based in General Academic & Professionals studies but the sample was too small to appear in Figure 4. The majority of students (56 per cent) are studying in the School of Health and Caledonian Business School.

**Figure 4: Schools and Departments**



In Figure 5, the majority of students are studying on part-time undergraduate degree courses (PTUG), with a quarter studying on part-time postgraduate degree courses (PTTPG) and four per cent studying part-time post-graduate degrees by research (PTRPG).

**Figure 5: Mode of study**



### **Fee Payer Type**

The majority of students are Home students (92 per cent). 5 per cent are EU students and the remaining 3 per cent are Overseas students.

### **Country of Domicile**

The majority are home students with most originating from Scotland (82 per cent), followed by England (6 per cent) and Ireland (2 per cent). However part-time students are a diverse population as students originate from 69 different countries. 3 per cent of the sample were students with an unknown domicile.

### **Ethnicity**

The majority of part-time students are White (66 per cent) followed by Black or Black British – African (2 per cent), Asian or Asian British – Pakistani (1 per cent) and Asian or Asian British – Indian (1 per cent). The students ethnicity was unknown for 27 per cent of the sample.

## 4. FINDINGS

The findings reported in this section include a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the survey and focus group/interview discussions. The students who participated in discussions were also asked to complete the survey. All percentages are either rounded up or down to the nearest decimal place.

### 4.1 Student profile information

143 students across five schools and 12 programmes completed the survey.

The majority of students in the sample were studying during the evening (86 per cent) followed by day release (17 per cent). However students also reported a mixed mode of study attending both evening and day time classes (15 per cent). Due to access issues the mode of study reported in Table 1 may not reflect the overall mode of study for part-time students at GCU. This data is not available.

Table 1: Mode of study

Mode of Study	N	%
Evenings	86	60
Day release	25	17
Attend relevant day modules	1	1
Blended learning	1	1
Evenings and day modules	6	4
Evenings and day release	21	15
Evenings, day release, distance/online	2	1
Evenings, day modules, distance/online	1	1

The sample also represented students across all levels, despite low numbers for postgraduate students. It is important to note that nearly a third of the sample were first year students and as they are new to the university may well be unaware of the Students' Association compared to other students.

Table 2: Level of study

Level of study	N	%
First year	39	27
Second year	40	28
Third year	46	32
Fourth year	11	8
Fifth year	1	4
Postgraduate	6	1

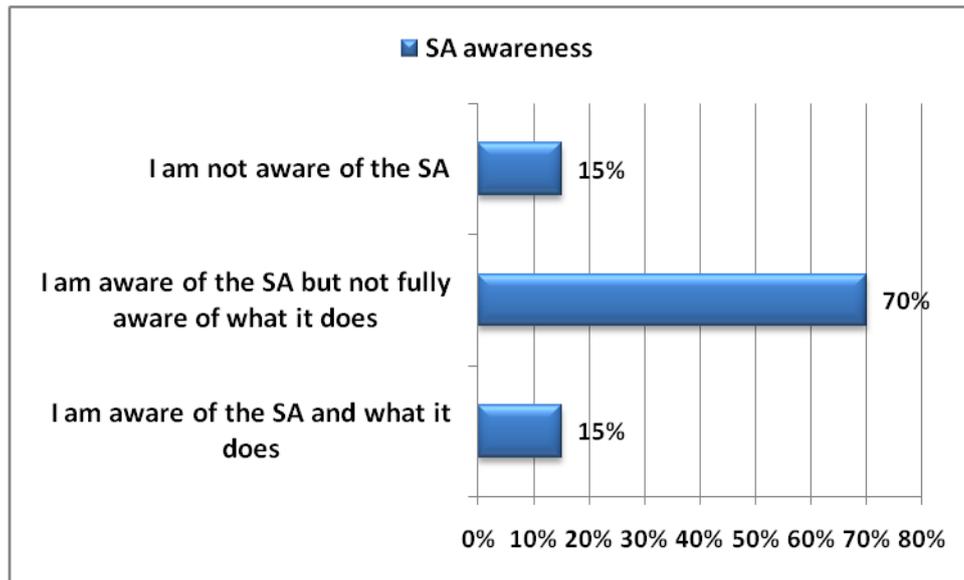
The findings section has been divided into themes that were explored both within the survey and focus group discussions. These are:

1. Awareness of the Students' Association and its services and activities
2. Involvement and usage of the Students' Association facilities
3. Communication
4. Moving forward – perceptions and suggestions regarding the effectiveness of the Students' Association services for part-time students

## 4.2 Awareness

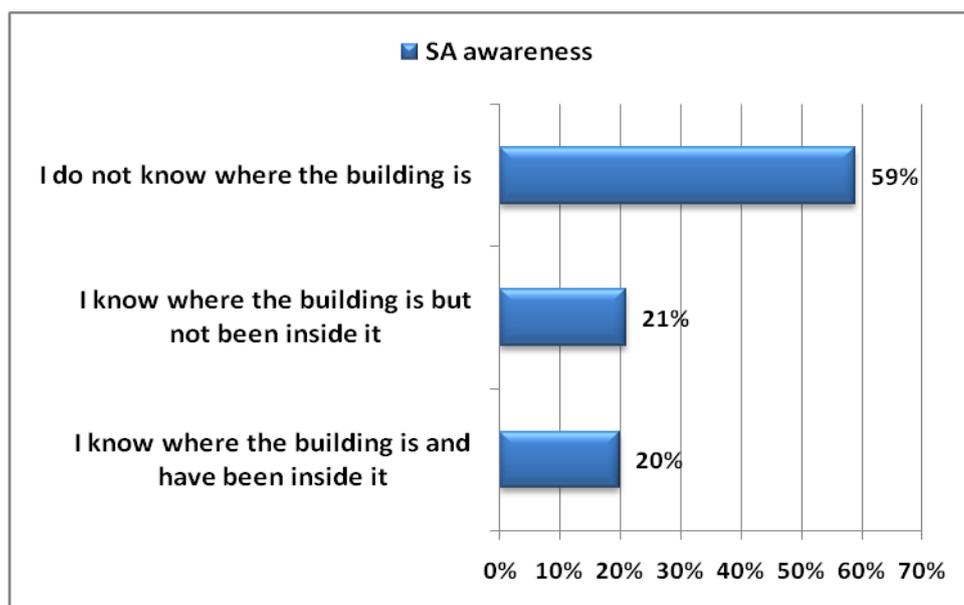
Students were asked what best describes their awareness of the Students' Association (see Figure 6). The majority of students (75 per cent) are aware that a Students' Association exists at GCU but they are not fully aware of what it does. 15 per cent are not aware of the Students' Association at all. Of the sample that was not aware of the Students' Association, 38 per cent were in first year and 43 per cent were in third year.

**Figure 6: Awareness of the Students' Association**



Knowledge of the Students' Association location also revealed that most of the students (59 per cent) do not know where the Students' Association building is (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Awareness of the location of the Students' Association**



The majority of students were aware that the Students' Association is run by an Executive committee (61 per cent).

Table 3: Awareness of an Executive Committee

Executive Committee	N	%
Yes	73	61
No	47	39

Of those that answered yes, they were asked if they knew the current members of the Executive Committee. However most of the respondents (91 per cent) were not aware of current members of the Executive committee, with only 8 per cent aware of some of them and 1 per cent aware of all of them.

Table 4: Awareness of the current members of the Executive Committee

Members of the Executive Committee	N	%
Yes, all of them	1	1
Yes, some of them	6	8
No	67	91

In the focus group discussions students were asked about their awareness of the Students' Association and how they found out about it. The general consensus from these discussions was that students were not fully aware of their services and facilities, mainly because they had little or no knowledge of what is available and that they do not use the services. Also students were unaware that facilities they were accessing were run by the Students' Association – notably the 24 hour computer lab which some of the students had already been using as one student explained, 'so I've used that but I wasn't aware it was the Students' Association'.

Only a few students had been in the Students' Association building so were not familiar with the newly implemented social space and 24 hour computer lab. Awareness of the Students' Association was greater amongst part-time students who were class representatives and those that read the emails from the Association:

*'probably quite familiar with it being a class rep you get quite a lot of emails about it. But kind of being here one day a week you don't get much contact with it'*

*'I don't really access the Caledonian website, only really to get onto Blackboard so it's mostly emails you would use'*

*'you flick through them [emails] do you know that way you're trying to sneak a peek in work to see what's going on so aye kind of pick up what kind of stands out to me you know'*

*'occasionally you get stuff through email but as a student rep I've had nothing to feedback to the guys at all'*

*'I didn't know [computer lab] it was in the basement here. I thought it was the Saltire'*

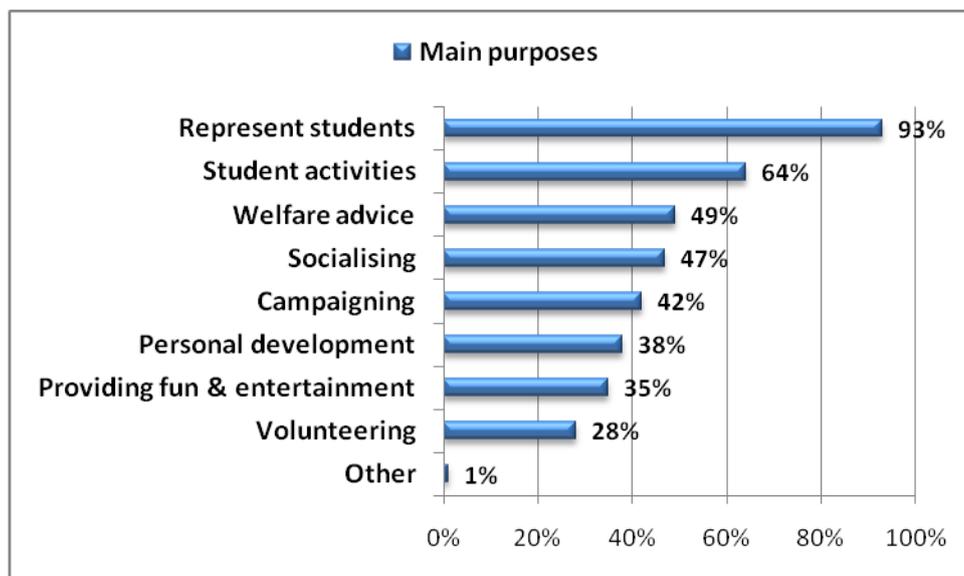
Awareness also links to aspects that are of interest to students as one student explained:

*'you kind of take notice of the stuff that kind of interests you ... I know that they were campaigning for the gym membership to be extended in the mornings'*

### 4.3 Purpose of the Students' Association

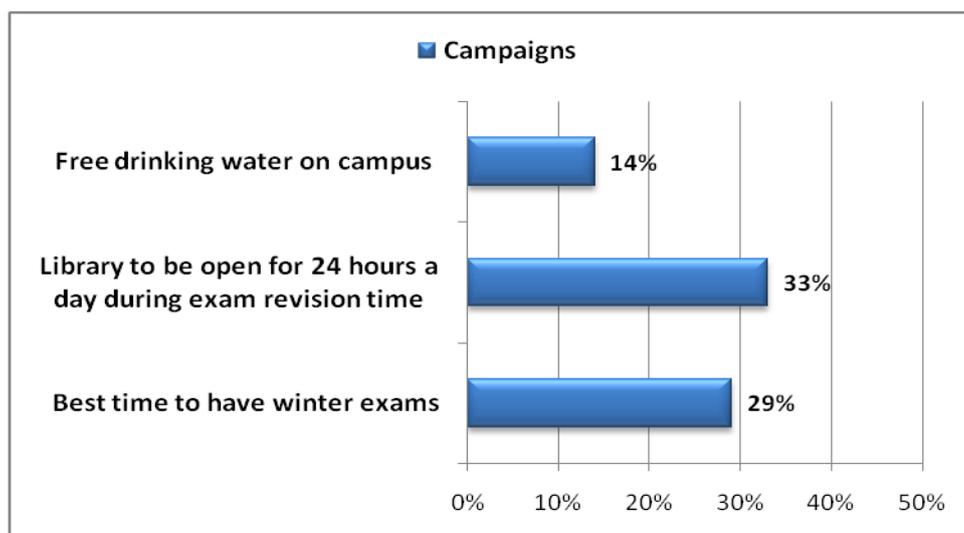
For those students who had some awareness of the Students' Association they were asked what they thought were the main purposes of the Students' Association. Figure 8 indicates that the top three main purposes included representing students (93 per cent), student activities (64 per cent) and welfare advice (49 per cent).

**Figure 8: Main purposes of the Students' Association**



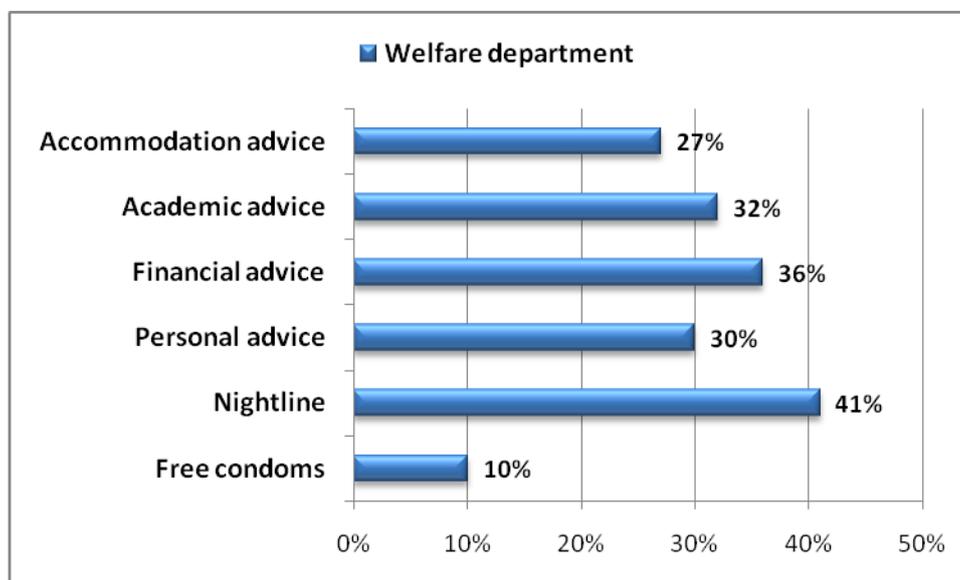
Students were asked about their awareness of three campaigns that have been run recently. The majority of students were not aware of any of the Students' Association campaigns (54 per cent). Figure 9 shows the percentage of students who were aware of particular campaigns. Students were most aware of the increased opening hours of the library during exam periods (33 per cent).

**Figure 9: Awareness of campaigns**



More students were aware of welfare services provided by the Students' Association (75 per cent) and Figure 10 shows the percentage of students who were aware of the different services. Of all the services, students were most aware of Nightline - the confidential listening and information service (41 per cent) and least aware of the free condoms (10 per cent).

**Figure 10: Awareness of the Welfare department**



#### 4.4 Involvement

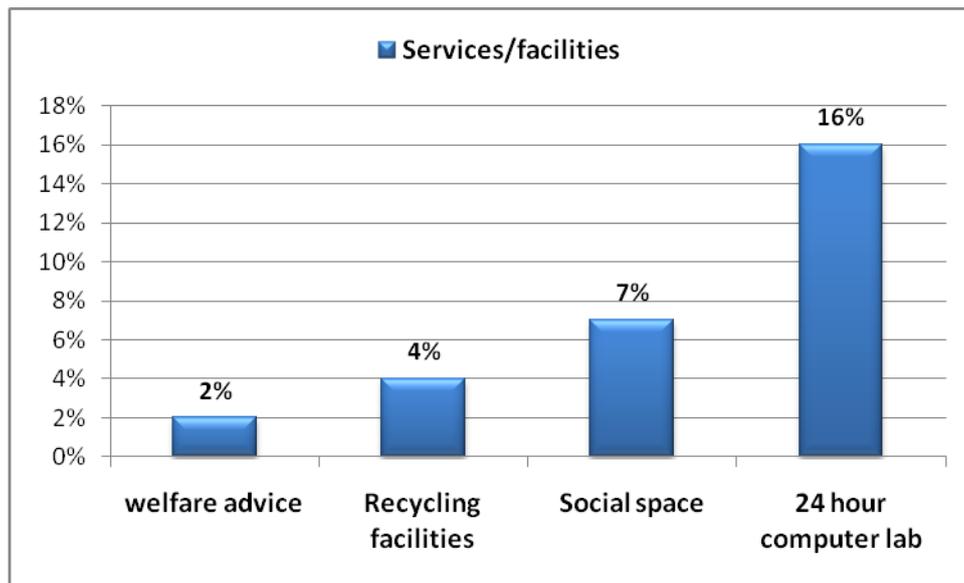
Students were also asked if they had been involved with any of the Students' Associations activities with the majority of students having had no involvement (88 per cent). Of the 12 per cent that were involved, Table 5 details where students were involved and the numbers reported. No students within this sample had been involved in 'welfare volunteer', 'nightline' and 'give it a go'.

**Table 5: Involvement with Students' Association activities**

Involvement in activities	N
Sports clubs/teams	5
Societies	1
Class rep	6
Caledonian Student Parliament	1
The Edit magazine	1
Radio Caley	1
Student Leaders Programme	1

Students were slightly more involved in terms of using facilities and accessing services compared to participating in activities run by the Students' Association. However a significant majority are still not accessing Students' Association provisions (76 per cent). Figure 11 shows the extent of usage from the 24 per cent of students who are involved where the majority of students have used the 24-hour computer lab (16 per cent) followed by the social space (7 per cent).

**Figure 11: Usage of facilities and services**



Students in the focus group discussions reported no involvement with any activities run by the Students' Association and explained that time was a reason for their lack of involvement as the following quotes illustrate:

*'I think because obviously we're studying because we're working at the same time so we don't really have that time'*

*'All the time we've got here is taken up with lectures so we don't have any time outwith that'*

Part-time students also explained that they tend to only be on campus when they have lectures and seminars or around exam time and when coursework is due in. Therefore accessing university services such as the library were important. Only one student mentioned accessing the gym in addition to studying whilst on campus:

*'I'll probably come in here and do it on a Sunday if I've got time ... it [the Saltire] does shut quite early I think'*

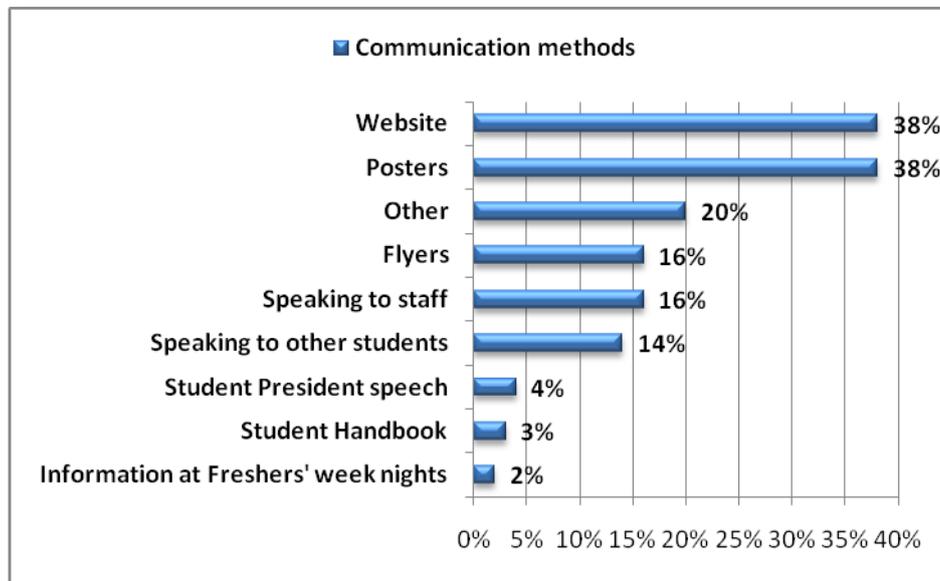
*'Library, gym, nothing much else ... I come in before work in the week days [to use the gym] and at the weekend if I have time I'll come in for a wee half hour or so'*

#### **4.5 Communication**

Figure 12 highlights the different ways that students heard about the Students' Association with some students hearing about it through more than one communication method. Although not a high percentage, the most common ways of hearing about the Students' Association includes via posters (38 per cent) and the website (38 per cent). Students also mention 'other' communication methods (20 per cent) with the most common response being through emails. Other individual responses include via lecturers during their induction, through the campaign for moving the winter exams and

from completing this survey. No students found out about the Students' Association from the open day event, Get Involved Fayre or Freebie Fayre both held in the Refectory Extension. Through the focus group discussions students were aware of the Students' Association after reading the Student Handbook, from previously studying at the university, when student representatives were elected and from posters around campus advertising activities.

**Figure 12: How students found out about the Students' Association**



In terms of regular communication the Students' Association keeps students informed about their services and activities and what is going on either via email or through the website. The majority of responses in the survey indicate that they never read the bi-monthly email that is sent to them (63 per cent) with one student indicating that they have never received an email from the Students' Association.

**Table 6: How often students read the bi-monthly email**

Bi-monthly email	N	%
Never	76	63
Occasionally	38	32
Often	6	5

Also the majority who responded to the survey had never visited the Students' Association website (60 per cent).

**Table 7: Visited the website**

Visited the website	N	%
Yes	35	29
No	73	60
Can't remember/unsure	14	12

Currently students receive emails from the Students' Association but they are not always read as some of the students in the focus groups explained:

*'I think sometimes you get emails and you just, I just look at them and you know if you think they're relevant to you, you open them. If you don't, you don't open them'*

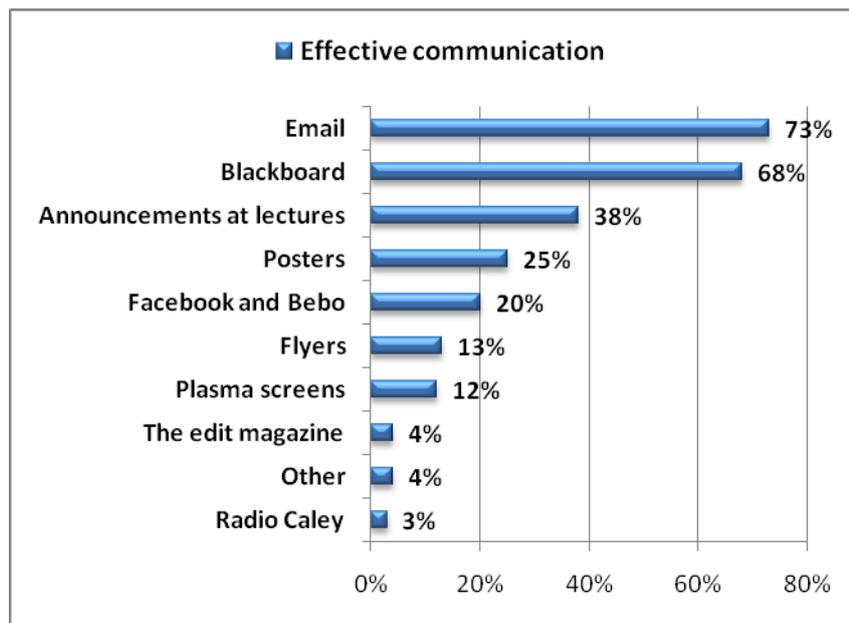
*'I kind of assume they won't be for me unless they're specifically say like from [lecturer] or something'*

*'I know that one of the girls [in the class] didn't check her email for about two years, I think she came in, she only realised she had it'*

*'At my work I cannot access my university emails'*

Survey respondents were also asked what they thought were the most effective ways for the Students' Association to communicate with them as part-time students to explore whether existing approaches are appropriate. Figure 13 indicates that the top three most effective communication methods include email (73 per cent), then Blackboard (68 per cent) followed by announcements at lectures (38 per cent). Other forms of communication included comments such as class visits, flyers at lectures, Induction and receiving texts. A couple of comments reported 'no' or that they were not really interested.

**Figure 13: Most effective communication methods**



When students in the focus groups were asked about the ways in which the Students' Association could better communicate with them some students mentioned announcements at lectures. It was also felt that it would have been helpful if someone from the Students' Association spoke to students when they first started their degree programme as this is the time that new students are finding out about the university. The following quotes illustrate the suggested communication methods:

*'I think just coming into the lectures, we're only here one day, if someone was to come in at the end [or start] of a lecture you know two minutes and speak directly to you and tell you about something I think that would resonate the most for me rather than emails'*

*'coming into classes, definitely aye. I mean we didn't know about what was going on with you until you came in so yeah definitely aye'*

*'As well as via Blackboard, depending on where it came up, perhaps when you open up Blackboard and also flyers'*

*'somebody specifically given the task to hand out flyers to older looking people as well!'*

*'Email or Blackboard I would say, or Facebook ... that would be a good medium'*

However one student felt that there was not a better way to communicate because of the nature of part-time study:

*'To be honest with you I don't think there is any best way to communicate with the students. I don't think there is a good way to communicate with mature students. You want to come in and do what you need to do and go because you're in for one day a week and that's it. That's it you're in, you've got a hit to do, you need to get some stuff done and then you need to go'*

When students were asked how the Students' Association could better promote its services, none of the students made any recommendations but provided the following comments:

*'No I don't think so, I think everywhere there is a lot of posters around but you start to be blind to posters, you don't notice but you get quite a lot of emails updating you'*

*'Well I think that's for the Student Union to decide ... the student union I suppose has been here as long as Glasgow Caly has been here so you must have had mature students coming through the door for all of that time so you must have a lot of experiences you've learned from. We're just here and we can't really guide the policy you should be giving it to us'*

The focus group discussions also generated responses which indicate that part-time students felt they were not really given any information about the Students' Association when they joined the university. To some extent students felt that the Association does not encourage part-time students to participate and this was particularly recognised during Freshers week, an important time to help students integrate into university life. The following quotes illustrate this:

*'I think that goes you know freshers week when you were coming in ... but there would be folk handing out leaflets and stuff like that and they'd look at you and not bother with you ... so you didn't get to find you know whatever they were handing out you didn't really get to know what was going on'*

*'I found that which was very funny because we just came in that first day and thought oh god it looks like a circus but then just nobody bothered with you'*

*'they're ageist'*

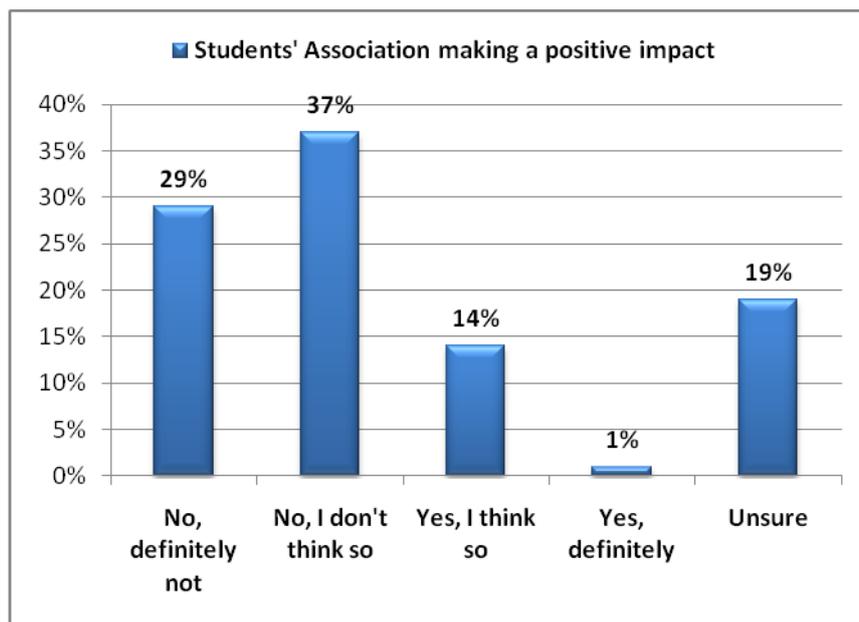
*'when I first walked through the doors last year to study, at freshers week students actually were like whoosh [indicate that they ignored you] you're too old that's it fine ... you know everyone's getting a flyer and you walk by'*

## 4.6 Moving forward: comments and suggestions

### 4.6.1 Impact of the Students' Association

In the survey respondents were asked if the Students' Association was making a positive impact on their time as a student at GCU. Figure 14 indicates that the majority of students (66 per cent) felt that the Students' Association was either not or definitely not making a positive impact on their time as a student at GCU. 19 per cent were unsure and 15 per cent felt that it was making a positive impact.

**Figure 14: The Students' Association making a positive impact**



Students were asked to expand on this and provide reasons for the type of impact the Students' Association was making on their experience of studying at GCU. Responses were grouped into positive impact, no impact and unsure as detailed in the following sections. It is important to keep in mind the number of first year students completing the survey, as the time the research was conducted most would be new to the university and still familiarising themselves with services and facilities. Therefore they may find it difficult to comment whether the Students' Association is making any kind of impact on their student experience.

#### 4.6.1.2 Positive Impact

Some students had used facilities and services offered by the Students' Association and saw these as aspects that were making a positive impact on their experience as a student at the university. In particular the campaign to extend the library opening hours during exam periods was having a positive impact. Interestingly the recently introduced 24 hour computer lab in the Students' Association building was having a positive effect on the student experience. The following quotes highlight this:

*'able to make use of some facilities offered by SU'*

*'introduction of 24 hour computer lab'*

*'It is in relation to improving on environmental issues like recycling and classroom accommodation including temperature'*

*'the 24 hour computer lab that I use is helpful'*

*'yes – re 24 hour library use and campaign for gym membership in the morning'*

*'I use the SA to meet other students to prepare for group assignments, use the computers and as a meeting place for coffee/lunch. Because of this I am aware of the radio and welfare'*

*'As a part-time student it is useful that the library is open for a longer period of time, especially when also working full time, giving limited time during the day to use such facilities'*

Even students that were not accessing the Students' Association still recognised the benefits of its existence and its role in representing students as the following quotes suggest:

*'Although not entirely aware of what the Students' Association does, I am aware that the representatives work in the background to make life 'easier' for students and they will actively take forward any problems or situations where it is difficult for a student to continue/support their education'*

*'I'm sure that even though I am not directly in contact, decisions are being made to improve the quality of student interaction at GCU for all students'*

*'I am aware that the service is available if I require support or guidance with issues relating to my time at university'*

*'Students Association does a lot of activities and student support if I require to use it'*

*'the only positive impact they have made is moving exams to December'*

*'they voice the students opinions and needs'*

*'I don't have any exposure but for full time and younger students I would think it very beneficial'*

#### **4.613 No Positive Impact**

The main reasons why the Students' Association had not had a positive impact for the students responding to the survey were because they do not access it or know anything about it. The following quotes illustrate these views:

*'have had no involvement with the SA therefore unable to have had an impact'*

*'if it wasn't there I wouldn't notice'*

*'I really only attend lectures and sometimes use library facilities'*

*'I do not hear from the Students' Association'*

*'It may be influencing my experience without my knowledge because I know very little about it'*

*'Know virtually nothing about the Student Association. As a part time student I assumed it was primarily for full time students only'*

*'I was unaware of the existence of the Students Association'*

Also respondents indicated that their status as a 'part-time student' meant that they would either not want to be involved, were unable to see the benefits of getting involved or feeling that it is more appropriate for full time students. Due to the lack of time spent on campus, part-time students are less aware of what is available to them through the Students' Association. Again the following quotes illustrate these views:

*'I am a mature student attending evening classes and my days of being an 'active student' are long gone!'*

*'I am a part-time student, paying for the course out of my own pocket'*

*'I see no benefit to me as a part time student'*

*'only in the university for one afternoon and evening'*

*'unfortunately due to work commitments I have not been able to participate in the Students Association events etc'*

*'Am here two evenings a week and was unaware of the existence of the association'*

*'As a part time student I am not aware of any member of the SA and feel unimportant'*

*'I'm not fully aware of what all the student association provides'*

*'being a part time student I feel that the Students' Association is geared towards full time students'*

*'Don't think part-time students are considered as part of the students association, full time students will have a greater say'*

*'no visibility for part time students – this questionnaire is the first exposure! Based around full time students and freshers week'*

*'Students Association only interested in younger students and not mature students. Appears that they are only interested in people when someone is looking to get elected or they are doing fundraising. Mature students are ignored during freshers week'*

*'the activities etc are directed at full time students'*

Further to the above comments about the part-time student status, time is clearly an issue in terms of accessing services or hearing about what is on offer to them. The timing of events and activities as well as the communication about this is not always appropriate for part-time students:

*'As a part time student attending on day release I do not feel the Students' Association is set up to make a positive impact on my university experience. Many meetings and training are arranged during working hours. The nature of being part time requires more direct communication. It appears that someone in my position is not accounted for by the Association'*

*'As an undergraduate I was involved in the basketball team. However since taking on a part-time course I do not spend much time on campus'*

*'I don't know much about them. We don't have much free time to find out about things like this on our one uni day/week'*

*'I would like to be involved but time constraints mean it's difficult'*

*'Part time students not informed of activities/student association involvement'*

*'Not seen much help given to me. Even though I think they can help. Find it hard to clearly find it'*

*'The Students Association do not engage with part time students. Events are run at times most part time students cannot attend ie. lunchtime events. Part time students are at work'*

*'there has been no physical contact with any students association members. In my experience class reps, have not been elected but chosen by course leader'*

The survey also generated comments that suggest the Students' Association was having a negative impact on their experience. In particular students raised issues with moving the winter exam dates suggesting that part-time students views were not accounted for in this decision making process:

*'campaigning to move the winter exams before Christmas was not based on the needs of part-time students. The majority of part-time students work full-time and this has had a major impact on the quality of learning. An ill thought through idea with a major impact'*

*'The move to pre-Christmas exams is difficult for part time students as many of us have limited time to study/revise as we work full-time'*

*'exam diets should be at a different time from coursework for part time students this is an onerous burden'*

#### **4.614 Unsure of Impact**

The main reasons why students were unsure of the impact again links to their status as a part-time student in that they are not fully aware of what the Students' Association does and unable to make use of the services and activities due to time constraints. Therefore it was difficult for them to comment whether the Students' Association is having any kind of impact on their student experience. The following quotes highlight some of these views:

*'I have never really felt the need to join, being part-time and working full time I am having difficulty with time management'*

*'due to not being on campus not aware'*

*'Not fully aware of services but I will now seek further info and feel that they will benefit me in the future'*

*'I have not had experience yet of the services the student association offers'*

*'don't know what they do so I don't know what impact they are making on my student life'*

*'Due to full time work I'm not much involved in student life, apart from attending classes and exams'*

*'I only do one day a week and it is very intense, therefore my whole time is taken up by lectures and labs. I have no real time whilst at GCU to do anything else'*

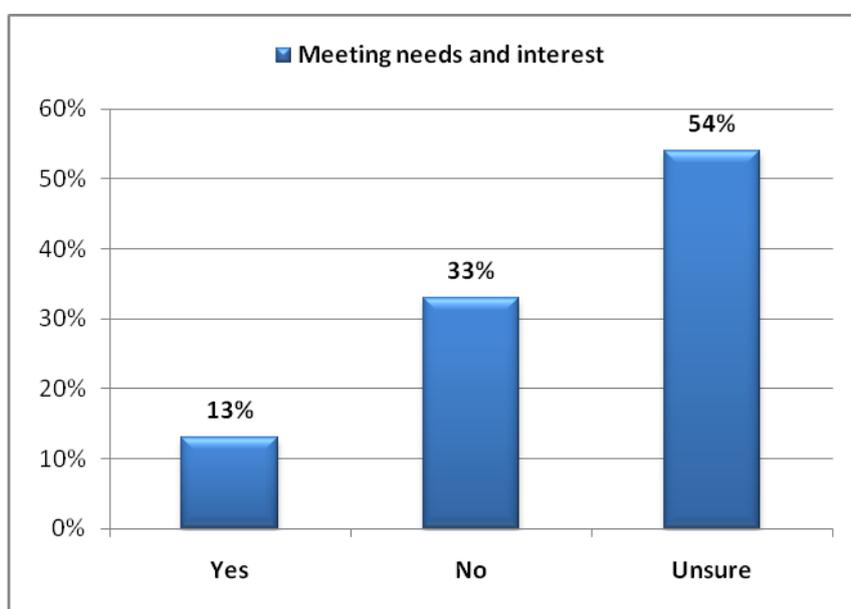
*'I'm not on campus enough to really appreciate what the Students' Association does'*

*'Since I have no real contact with the university outside of attending my classes, I'm not sure if it has a great effect or not'*

#### 4.62 Meeting needs and are of interest to part-time students

Respondents were asked if they thought that the services and activities met their needs and were of interest to them. The findings in Figure 15 below reinforce the fact that part-time students are unfamiliar with the Students' Association with the majority of students (54 per cent) indicating that they were unsure whether the services and activities met their needs.

**Figure 15: Meetings needs and are of interest to students**



Again students were asked to provide reasons why they thought this with comments matched against yes, no and unsure responses. These comments are detailed below.

#### 4.621 The Students' Association does meet their needs or is of interest to them

Students that responded yes to this question provided a handful of comments with the suggestion that if they were more aware of what is already available they may find that this is beneficial to them. In particular the recognition of campaigns such as the 24 hour opening time of the library during the exam period was considered important to them. Some students felt that what is already available does meet their needs but they are either not aware or access similar services outside of university:

*'I believe they would if I was more aware of the benefits provided'*

*'I don't have many needs from the university as such'*

*'services well catered for part-time students'*

*'the campaign to open the library for 24 hours a day during exam time has proved useful'*

*'yes for the campaign involving 24 hours services at exams'*

*'there are various sport activities I would take part in but already do so in organisations outwith the uni'*

*'they are there if needed but I do not have time to get involved'*

*'they look appealing'*

*'they would if they were required'*

*'welfare dept are helping with complaints about new exam timetables'*

#### **4.622 The Students' Association does not meet their needs or is of interest to them**

Students that felt the Students' Association did not meet their needs suggested that they thought full time students and younger students are a priority to the Students' Association as the following comments illustrate:

*'feel they are working more in favour of full time students'*

*'Freshers is mainly aimed at full time, live in students'*

*'Doesn't feel like there is anything provided for part time students by SA. Have we ever been asked before?!'*

*'I see nothing that applies/benefits me. The campaign to make exams before Christmas has increased stress and pressure on part-time students. Every student needs as much time as possible for revision as those with families/full time jobs need this more than ever'*

*'little interaction with part time students – seems focused on full time students'*

*'never had any interest in part-time students. Our views are not heard'*

*'older students are not included as they should be'*

*'student association only interested in younger students and not mature students. Appears that they are only interested in people when someone is looking to get elected or they are doing fundraising. Mature students are ignored during freshers week. As a part time student and only in the university one day and an occasional evening, feel totally isolated. We are employed full time as well as a part-time student so do not have the time or inclination to attend events which are attended by young who think that university life involves constant socialising and as little study as possible'*

*'our class is not represented in the Students Association'*

The concern over lack of time was raised but there was also the suggestion that they may use services if they were available at more appropriate times as the following responses indicate:

*'hard to see help at the time we go to class'*

*'I am only really attending lectures at the university and work mostly from home or online'*

*'I do not really get a chance to engage with the SA as only here one day a week'*

*'I finish work at 6 – gym closes at 8.30, library open 9-6 at weekends. Exams before xmas with no study time makes for a very difficult time ahead'*

*'not got the time for activities as I also work full time'*

*'only attend two evenings per week and live outside Glasgow and very rarely use uni at weekends'*

*'there are never any sorts of events that are times which are appropriate for part-time students'*

Other issues raised included lack of awareness and communication:

*'Not aware enough of services and activities offered'*

*'I do not know anything about it'*

*'there seems to be no interaction between the association and part-time students (night)'*

*'we never see anyone or hear anything really'*

*'I don't think the services are promoted as well to or aimed at part time students. However many university facilities are like this'*

Students in the focus groups were asked if they were interested in the activities and services offered by the Students' Association after seeing what was available from the lists in the questionnaire. The general response suggests that they are not interested:

*'Not really no'*

*'I've had a quick look but not really. I'm quite focused on just getting done what needs to be done'*

*'and I think we all tend to get the student bit and just look at Blackboard, use the library'*

When asked why the services and activities are not of interest to them, the students in the focus groups responded with various reasons which included the views that they are more applicable to younger students, the lack of time to be involved and that their needs are different in that their time at university is spent studying:

*'I don't know how much it really applies to us because we're all obviously mature students, we all work full time...you know so our time is really really hectic. When we're not working we're studying or dealing with family situations so there's not really any time for me to be an 18 year old student'*

*'we are in, its nine till six we're in with an hours break so if we're not at the gym or the lab we're at the refectory and you know that's it. It's really just the one day so I don't think we'd really have time to engage because you work full time as well and then at nights you're trying to get stuff done so no I don't think so'*

*'As long as we're getting our study space and we've got decent lecturers I mean I'm quite happy'*

*'yeah its not such a big deal [no union bar] for us as I say there's no time'*

*'it's not pertinent to me because I'm here to learn a subject ... because I've already done all that stuff before and now I'm doing it for work. So I've not got the kind of issues that a student will have like funding, money problems and so forth so its like this is just another part of my normal days work'*

It was also recognised that if students did not live in Glasgow it is very unlikely that they would travel in for a social event organised in the evening as one student explained, 'I think they're too far to come back in for a social event or something you know I don't think they'd really bother it's just to get their work done really you know'. Again the time available to participate in student life is a concern with general agreement amongst the focus group participants:

*'I don't know, as someone else was saying when you're part-time, when you're here it's a full day you know and then you go off and you're back to work again and it's a study day and the time when you're here that you're studying you know because you've got limited time so there's not a lot of social time'*

*'I think a lot of us have got families and that as well so you're juggling that so there's very little free time to get involved in things like that'*

#### **4.623 Unsure whether the Students' Association meets their needs or is of interest to them**

The majority of students commented that they were unsure whether the services and activities already provided by the Students' Association met their needs or were of interest to them. The main reason was due to the lack of awareness and that a lot of them knew very little about particular provisions. This is partly due to their part-time status and lack of time involved in university life but also because they have not been provided with any information about the Students' Association. This is illustrated through the various quotes provided below:

*'I am merely aware of SA – I wouldn't know how to contact'*

*'I do not know what they do'*

*'I don't know enough about the Student Association to say yes or no to this question'*

*'I'm not aware of any initiatives run by the student association. I am only in uni one day a week and I'm in lectures constantly except for lunch where I go off site'*

*'not fully aware of what is available'*

*'not sure what services and activities they offer'*

*'what are they?'*

*'As a part-time student time spent within the university is considerably less than a full time student and therefore I have not been able to establish if the services meet my needs to any sufficient extent'*

*'As unaware of a lot of the services cannot really comment if they meet my needs'*

*'not really aware of what the Students' Association offer at the moment'*

Students felt that the Students' Association needs to raise awareness so that they would be able to comment on whether what they offered met their needs as one student reported: *'need more information publicised via email, blackboard etc to know all services offered'* and *'not aware of what goes on. The emails just get deleted. Other forms of communication would be useful'*

The second largest response came from students indicating that the lack of time made it difficult for them to engage or have the time to find out about it:

*'Due to having various other commitments such as working full time, studying and family life this is not something that I would have time for'*

*'Have only recently discovered the SA through using the computer. Good to know services are there, however I study part-time, work full-time and have a family so not a lot of time left!'*

*'I am not on the campus enough to really appreciate what the Students' Association does'*

*'I do not have a lot of spare time to take part in activities'*

*'most of us in the class work full-time and have personal commitments, so don't really have time to engage with services provided by the SA'*

*'not enough time to benefit from an association'*

*'not had much time to investigate'*

*'only on campus one day, the full day is taken up by lectures therefore I don't feel that I have the opportunity to use any other service'*

*'lots of activities are day time so unsuitable. There doesn't seem to be any crèche facilities available [in the evening]'*

*'maybe we should be more involved but it's really just one day a week and you're struggling to get everything done you know aye so we're a bit old'*

Some students found it hard to comment and reported that it was not a service they would refer to or use:

*'haven't had any use of services so can't comment'*

*'never been approached or had direct communication'*

*'never experience activities'*

*'It has less of a direct impact on my university life because I am part-time and physically on campus so little. However, I am aware of its existence and that I can use the services provided if I need them or chose to become involved'*

*'I have never had any dealings yet with the student association but I am sure they are really very helpful'*

*'I have not needed to use any of these'*

*'not been in a situation where I have used the service'*

Several students commented in the survey and within the group discussions that they felt the Students' Association was not applicable to them or that they would not need to access the services offered:

*'there seems to be loads and loads if you're kind of young and here for fun as well as study'*

*'I think most of likes of the welfare things we've got that offered through our work as well you know'*

*'I think we're quite well paid students you know so I don't think we can really complain about the kind of finance things'*

*'You get support at work if you're lucky and there's social things that are organised through work so you can get all that but maybe organised through your work'*

*'I know that a lot of the stuff when it comes to freshers week and we're a bit older, we're not really bothered about that. For us ... been to uni before so we've done the getting drunk and having fun you know so the majority, we're just seeing it as a means to an end, we've got a job at the end of it ... so its just a case of passing your exams'*

*'oh I read the emails but sometimes I think it's not relevant ... because as I say if we were here, if you played more part of it, say you were in a mixed class for example'*

*'because a lot of people in this particular class are older so you've not got that kind of young element whereas they might have the same issues. Like see on the television about funding, grants, how you pay for this, all that kind of stuff, we've not really got an issue with it'*

*'I would say that when we're in class this is in addition to our career, not aiming for a career. With the best will in the world we want to be here'*

*'don't need the support offered'*

*'do not envisage a need to use the services as a part-time student'*

*'no requirement from SA needed'*

*'not aware of anything that the students association can help part time students with'*

*'part time student don't feel that I need the service'*

In the focus group discussions students were asked if and how the Students' Association could dispel the perception that part-time students do not feel that the Association is applicable to them. The few responses to this question suggest that the lack of involvement and participation is not necessarily an issue for them:

*'I think see to be honest with you I think the Student Association does everything in its power to include everyone I don't think it's the Students Association. I do just genuinely think that if we wanted to get involved there's every chance for us to get involved and if we make the time it is there ... I do sometimes feel like we are isolated a little bit but that's due to our circumstances and we should*

*maybe make more of an effort to get involved in uni stuff but to be honest it's a means to an end for me. I'm not really interested in socialising with people, I've got my friends you know, I've got my social life outside, its just a case of passing exams and going'*

*'I don't think it's something that the Student Association should be worrying about because they're doing everything in their power to include everyone and provide things'*

*'I've kind of had the uni experience, if I hadn't had the university experience prior to coming to Caly maybe I would feel a bit more like I should be getting involved but no I think they do everything possible'*

*'I agree with that, I feel the more mature students don't feel that they really need it'*

*'I think the support function is not a major issue with regards to part-time. Part-time students who are working, who are employed, the life skills that the part-time students have got actually override the support the Students' Association give'*

*'the life skills we've gathered as mature students if you want of a better word, supersede probably any of the kind of stuff that the Students' Association would want to give us'*

*'I think its relevant to some of the younger kids that are coming straight out of school because they don't know any other environment, they're still in an academic environment ... whereas we've been out and we've actually been dealing with the issues that are related to employment ... so I don't think you know from my own personal point of view, I gain anything from the likes of the Students' Association'*

Interestingly students also recognised that needs would vary within the part-time student cohort depending on individual circumstances. In particular this related to age, previous student experience and current employment situation:

*'There will be part time students that are obviously in a younger age group as well that its maybe getting those folk ... because we're doing this through our work route you know so its maybe about that age group'*

*'I think for younger people, the Students Association does a fantastic job ... I think when you've been to uni once and you've done the rammys and getting p\*\*\*\*d and stuff you kind of just want to get the job done now and get your money'*

*'Part-time students who are maybe learning something new it's a totally different kettle of fish, but this particular course that we're doing everybody works for an employer'*

#### **4.63 Part-time student's needs**

It was recognised that those studying part-time – particularly mature students – would have different needs as they come to the university with a different approach compared to younger students as a couple of students commented:

*'I think we would probably come with quite a different attitude as well when we're sitting in with sort of full time students we had sort of a different approach to the lectures and they're a wee bit more kind of laid back constantly, their phones going off and wee comments getting shouted and we're all sitting down the front'*

*'some are given time from our employers so there's more of a commitment I would say from the part-time students'*

Part-time students who are new to studying or returning after a long period away from studying due to employment or family responsibilities, often find the environment unfamiliar and may require support when they initially start in terms of information about the library and study skills. The unfamiliarity of university systems when starting university was felt by some of the students involved in the focus group discussions:

*'I think the hardest thing for me is coming in, what you call a university and trying to get things organised like your library, trying to get your matriculation'*

*'see the library scenario, see if there was better support from the Students' Association with regards to for example when you're doing your reports about when you're referencing [refworks]'*

*'I know the first week or so I wouldn't use the library but all this stuff, right over the head because you were too busy trying to get your courseworks and thinking about what you need to do, everything was new'*

Students involved in the focus groups were asked what their needs were as part-time students and the extent to which the Students' Association could meet those needs. Student responses involved discussions about their academic needs in terms of accessing the library and using the effective learning service. Students also discussed the importance of flexibility in accessing services and facilities within the university. Although students did not suggest how the Students' Association could meet these needs, as these relate more to university services and facilities, it is likely this could be done through representation and campaigning.

*'I think its just because we're working and you're only here that day, well a couple of hours a night, then a full day you know so I think its quite hard going you know. I don't think there's anything that you can do I think they just need to cut our days back'*

*'lab access, access to lecturers you know if they're there, the gym, decent food facilities so you know that in the hour that you do have you can just nip down. I can't think what else really'*

The library and accessing facilities related to studying is important for part-time students and the difficulty in accessing these resources was prevalent in the discussions. Time spent accessing this is restricted for part-time students who may only be able to allocate a small amount of personal time in the evenings or at weekends to use study facilities. In particular, the lack of library texts available as full-time students can often access these first. There are also concerns that other students use IT facilities for social networking reasons rather than studying. The following quotes illustrate these sentiments:

*'the actual books aren't available for me to use so you get marked down on your courseworks because you've not referenced'*

*'what's really annoying is that when you do try to access it, it will tell you that's its not available [book] and we just can't get it and by the time that it is available it's too late'*

*'these are important to us because we are mature students and we're not here all the time'*

*'It is social networking they're not using it for study and if we need it for study we could do with an area for part-time ... they should have study only computers'*

The time that support is available is often not suitable for part-time students as one focus group respondent explained that training is only available at a time when they are in lectures:

*'you can practice it anytime but to actually sit it there are specific times and we work all week apart from the Monday and a Monday we're in lectures so it doesn't really fit in that well ... the union want to do something about that and say you need to make this more flexible for these people, that would be really helpful'*

#### **4.64 Suggested services and activities**

The questionnaire also provided students with the opportunity to suggest services and activities that they would like the Students' Association to provide. However students recommended that the Students' Association communicates better about existing services and facilities rather than suggested new or improved ones:

*'Facebook updates'*

*'better communication with part-time students'*

*'I think what is already provided is excellent; raising awareness for part-timers would be beneficial'*

*'more support and awareness of services on offer to part-time students'*

*'updates on services provided'*

Without suggesting any type of action some students felt that the Students' Association should be doing more for part-time students with respondents reporting:

*'activities which involve part-time students, not just focusing on full time students'*

*'better representation and engagement with part-time students'*

*'current services seem fine – just more availability/info for part-time students'*

*'ensure democratic appointment of class reps. Face to face meetings prior to class starting'*

*'more effective support and campaigning on key and relevant issues. I would like to see a campaign to reinstate the winter exams in January'*

*'put the exam dates to what they were. 'If it's not broken, don't fix it'*

*'recognise the diversity of older/mature part-time students who are past the stage of getting out their face on alcohol'*

*'something to encourage working students/older students to get involved and share experience of life or work with others'*

Timing issues were mentioned again with part-time students often only on campus for classes. Other students suggested changes to the timing of services and activities as they are unable to participate during the day:

*'Find what's on offer is quite comprehensive but due to time restraints don't use the service to its benefit'*

*'I am not in university often enough to benefit from any of these as I have no time. I come into university for classes and that is all. I work full time and so rarely go into university unless for classes'*

*'Time constraints possibly mean many part-time students do not engage more'*

*'I would love to be involved in sports and politics but I work full time'*

*'Evening sessions'*

*'Run student events in the evening as well as during the day to allow part time students to attend'*

*'As a single parent I think the university should offer crèche facilities to allow students to attend evening classes and study'*

*'Longer opening hours at weekends, being part-time only time can come in and need a life too! Seminars at night, guest speakers at night. Base open at night.'*

*'Longer opening times at weekends, six o'clock is rubbish when it's the only time you can come into the library for long study periods. After working all day, not always suitable to study during the week'*

Students were also interested in receiving support related to academic studies:

*'What would be useful from the Students' Association for me would be support in learning library layout, IT systems etc. When only study part time it is difficult to come to groups with these things'*

*24 hour library, 24 hour lab, exams after Christmas'*

*'information and guidance services'*

*'more information on study methods etc'*

*'more support for part-time study'*

*'more support or guest lectures at night for people who can't make it to the day time guest speakers'*

*'academic advice' and 'study advice'*

*'help with library and IT'*

*'part time networking events'*

In terms of the social side of university life, students recommended such things as sporting activities and a few students suggested a new student union bar:

*'5 aside football league'*

*'A new student union bar, to provide somewhere to relax after classes'*

*'a student union bar'*

*'cheap drink with fun events'*

*'political associations/debate/clubs'*

*'possible health and beauty events for fundraising'*

*'social events'*

A few students felt there was nothing they could suggest or were unsure, 'not really aware of what they do offer so difficult to comment' and 'not sure as I am part time evening its hard to know' or that the Students' Association already offers the right kinds of services as students explained:

*'I think the welfare service and Nightline are critical and provide support to those in need. The social and sporting activities are also important for inclusion and assist the settling-in process and helps to build a sense of belonging and helps create lasting relationships'*

*'I'm happy with things as they are'*

When students in the focus group were asked to recommend services or activities they would like to see offered, suggestions included 'a pub' and 'early gym membership'. However some students were unsure about what the Students' Association could offer them and highlighted again the fact that time to engage is a continuing problem:

*'I think if we had more time it might be something'*

*'I don't know what it would be though that I would be interested in'*

*'To be honest with you I don't know'*

*'yeah probably but I don't actually know what our needs would be because everything's pretty much covered'*

*'No not very much. I think that from what I read from the emails and I see around about me the campaigns and stuff, everything is catered for you know you can't really complain'*

When asked if their student experience would be enhanced if they got involved with the Students' Association, one student responded:

*'possibly, I think I'd like to get involved with like ski clubs or whatever, kind of sport clubs there is but again it's a timescale thing and there's a lot of stuff that goes on during the day like they have meetings and we can't get away from work at three o'clock. But yeah if there was maybe something a provision for that but again I think I'm quite happy and I know maybe we're kind of on the fringes of the uni social scene but its do you know that way like I say I just feel too old'*

#### 4.65 Additional comments

Respondents were also asked to provide any additional comments or suggestions, which are detailed below. The main issues again link to communication, raising awareness and greater engagement with part-time students:

*'signposting and repetition is often the best policy. Make part-time students aware that the SA is not only there for full time students'*

*'get out and speak to students'*

*'better awareness on Blackboard'*

*'clear emails sent to all students would be a good idea'*

*'engage with part-time students at Induction'*

*'I think had a Students' Association rep been at my Induction event then my awareness and use of services would have been greater. Being postgrad/part-time students and older here found that never approached by any reps in common areas and at gates (ie.freshers week) and get impression that activities may be focused on younger students'*

*'It would be great to see more effort to find out what the needs of students (part-time) are'*

*'Need to make much greater effort to engage with part-timers. Staff should be invited to attend induction for students. I would have welcomed someone to walk me and other students round the campus when I started'*

*'take more into account older, and people from different cultures... student association does nothing to assist my experience as a part-time student at GCU'*

*'perhaps there could be some way of specifically targeting the part-time students'*

*'Consideration could be given to the class reps having better communication systems with their groups and perhaps they would be able to let people know more about the SA activities and so on. You do a great job – shame more students aren't aware of this or making use of it'*

*'I didn't know that the 24 hour computer lab was a student association facility. I have used it and would again'*

Students also provided their views of the recent date change for the winter exams. The following quotes illustrate their thoughts on this:

*'ask for exams to be spread out more. This affects all students'*

*'campaign to return exam diets till after Christmas – student association should look at the needs of all the student body, not those who campaign to party over Christmas'*

*'consider the results of changes on the student population on the whole and not just full timers. I pay out my own pocket and will be badly affected by exam times'*

*'Exams should be put back to Jan not Dec'*

*'Pre-Christmas exams is stupid as xmas break from work was study opportunity'*

*'support the change back to the previous exam calendar'*

*'the exams shod be moved back to their original times/dates'*

*'staggered exams for part-time students'*

Students also commented on issues that can be linked to their part-time status:

*'More assistance for full time working people'*

*'My view is that part-time students/mature students (who can be one and the same) seem to be geared around full-time "timetable"'*

*'Part time evening classes do seem to be like a different place'*

*'Part-time students self-exclude in many ways because most work full-time and have family/social ties which restrict participation in most activities. Perhaps more promotion is required aimed directly at part time students, highlighting the full range of SA activities'*

*'making library opening hours longer at the weekend and ensuring that levels three and four are kept quiet'*

*'the toilets in the Saltire centre are disgusting and when using facilities at weekends of exam time there is no access to clean toilets in the main building'*

*'I know of many full time students who have become involved with the Students' Association and the activities they provide and have really enjoyed them however as a part time student I am happy to attend lectures when required and then go home'*

*'hardly any contact with students' association, feel its more tailored towards full-time students. There might be activities of interest but as time on campus is limited, info should maybe made available in other other areas like the CPD centre'*

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to explore part-time students' views of the Students' Association and whether they believed that the services and activities offered met their needs or were of interest to them. The next section summarises the findings from the research and is followed by a section offering some recommendations.

### 5.1 Conclusions

#### 5.12 Awareness

The main issue to come out of this research relates to awareness as the data suggests that the majority of students responding to the survey and involved in the discussions are not fully aware or familiar with what the Students' Association does, where it is located and the campaigns that it runs. Students had greater awareness of the welfare services provided by the Students' Association although knowledge was still low. Due to this low awareness it was difficult for students to comment whether the services and activities met their needs and are of interest to them.

#### 5.13 Involvement

Most of the respondents have no involvement with activities run by the Students' Association but tend to be more involved in using services and facilities. Suggested reasons for no or low involvement included the lack of time and lack of knowledge with what is on offer to them. The evidence also indicates that students access what is important to them which include computer and library facilities. Those that are familiar with the Students' Association believe the existing services and provisions are good but do not participate due to time constraints.

#### 5.14 Communication

The most frequently cited ways that students found out about the Students' Association was through posters and the website. Students also indicated that the emails they received were not always read despite the majority of students suggesting that this method is the best way to communicate with them. Other communication methods that would be most effective included Blackboard and announcements at lectures. The research also highlighted concerns from students that communication from the Students' Association was poor in that many felt they were excluded or ignored during freshers week. However, this perceived exclusion is possibly linked to the PR from external nightclubs at the university gates, which the Students' Association has no connection to.

#### 5.15 Views of the Students' Association

The majority of students responded that they did not think the Students' Association was making a positive impact on their experience as a student at GCU. Contributing factors to this view included the lack of knowledge and use of the Students' Association, the lack of time to be involved as well as the view that the Association caters more for full-time students. Positive impact linked to the longer opening hours of the library and IT facilities.

Most students were unsure whether the Students' Association met their needs or was of interest to them because they lack awareness. Where it did meet their needs this involved the campaign for extending the opening hours of the library. Where students reported that the services and activities on offer did meet their needs the reason why they do not participate or access them is mainly due to lack of time. Other students felt that it did not meet their needs because they thought it catered more for full time students, the time to participate was not appropriate and that it was not applicable to them. Some students felt that the Students' Association could not meet their needs or that they were not interested in using this service.

### 5.16 The needs of part-time students

It appears that part-time students would like support that is related to their studies. This includes support in relation to using the library and assistance with academic writing skills.

### 5.17 Suggested services and activities

Better communication of existing provisions and more engagement with part-time students, availability of services at times that suit part-time students and support in relation to their academic studies and related needs in terms of computer access and library resources.

## 5.2 Recommendations

There are some specific recommendations about raising awareness and communication as the lack of knowledge about the Students' Association appears to be the major outcome of this research. Without knowledge of what the Students' Association offers this then makes it difficult for students to comment about whether the services meet their needs or not. Evidence suggests that where students have awareness they believe that existing services are appropriate and could potentially meet their needs. Therefore increasing awareness of existing facilities rather than necessarily changing or adding services is important. The research also highlights aspects of university life that are important to part-time students and perhaps students require support from the Students' Association in terms of these issues.

### Raising awareness and improving communication with part-time students:

- Induction is a key time to inform students about what the Students' Association can do for them. Most part-time students will be finding out about the university at this time and more likely to be present on campus. Therefore attendance at Induction lectures is important so that the Students' Association can speak directly to part-time students. Recognising the difficulty of having the capacity to attend all Induction lectures with part-time students, the Students' Association could create a short video to be shown during the lecture that summarises their services and activities. This could then be distributed to programme leaders to incorporate into their Induction session.
- Communication methods that appear important to students are email, Blackboard and announcement at lectures. There is evidence that emails are ignored if students feel that they are not applicable to them. Raising awareness might change this perception but in the meantime addressing emails to particular subgroups – in this case part-time students – then the emails may be considered more applicable to them. Attendance at lectures throughout the academic year by staff from the Students' Association is also important to find out about students' views and at the same time informing them of the Association's activities. There is a need to engage more with part-time evening students, as they are perhaps the most isolated group with many facilities/services not available in the evening.
- Greater communication with part-time student class representatives is required. Improvements to the class rep system could involve the Quality Office establishing effective feedback mechanisms with part-time students on their learning experience.
- Marketing material should ensure that all students are represented by including part-time students in marketing campaigns, such as posters or through case studies on the Students' Association website of part-time students' who have used or become involved with the Association.

- Focus attention on raising awareness of the new social space and computer lab to encourage part-time students to use the building. As a result part-time students might access other services and become more familiar with the Students' Association provisions as this quote aptly summarises, *'I use the SA to meet other students to prepare for group assignments, use the computers and as a meeting place for coffee/lunch. Because of this I am aware of the radio and welfare'*

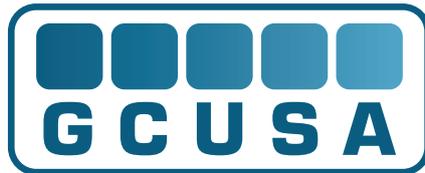
### Recognising the needs of part-time students

- Further investigation is needed to evaluate the demand for running evening or weekend events, and the frequency and nature of them for part-time students. It is important therefore to understand patterns of attendance of part-time students to see when they are on campus and the times at which they could potentially access the Students' Association. This would help inform the Students' Association as to when potential social events could run as well as increasing flexibility in accessing services and facilities. This information could be gathered by emailing students or through attendance at lectures.
- Increasing knowledge and awareness that within the part-time student cohort there may be different needs between mature and younger students. There are some suggestions in the research that younger part-time students may have more interest in accessing the Students' Association than mature students. This will require further exploration.
- Continue to support part-time students' needs in relation to the academic aspects of their university experience as the research findings suggest this is important to part-time students. The Students' Association could also continue to survey the learning needs of part-time students.
- Continue to gather evidence from part-time students when they access services to find out if existing support is appropriate for them or if they have recommendations of alternative ways that the Students' Association could support them.

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