

## **OPENING ADDRESS**

### **Equal? Diverse? Accessible?**

Author: Professor John Brooks, Vice-Chancellor

It was a great pleasure to welcome colleagues to this inter-faculty Learning and Teaching Conference. We are entering uncertain and challenging times. The same week that the conference was held, the much-anticipated White Paper was published, laying out the Government's intention to create more competition within an expanded and diversified sector. Our main challenge at Manchester Metropolitan University is to continue our drive to improve the student experience, with measurable improvement in progression and satisfaction. We occupy a highly anomalous position now, being the most popular university in the UK, but with



below sector average student satisfaction. Our 'full fee' 2012 entry is upon us, when we expect our student numbers to be reduced by between 8 and 12%.

I believe that one of the greatest threats to university education is the potential loss of diversity, both in terms of the range of provision and the diversity of the student body. There is a threat that students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be 'expected' to attend their local low cost FE college as their HE experience. While this may suit some, it is vital that we continue to offer transformational opportunities for a diverse student body. To this end we have announced our £10M MMU Bursary Scheme that will offer a £3,000 bursary to every first year student from a low income family.

You will be aware that our fees have been set in the range £8,000 to £9,000 and it is vital that we offer a high quality Learning and Teaching experience which demonstrates outstanding value for money. However, the backdrop to Learning and Teaching is changing and expectations are increasingly high. KIS data will publicly reveal areas of strength and weakness and this will directly influence choice. Student numbers will be switched from underperforming subject areas.

We continue to invest in our educational future. We are two thirds of the way to completing our £300M capital programme, and we have made a massive investment in IT and Moodle. However, the key is the classroom experience in its totality and while technology can enhance the experience, it cannot and should not replace high quality, face-to-face contact. But, face-to-face must be effective, efficient and economic. It must also strive to offer inclusivity and to enrich diversity. We use the phrase 'diverse student body' as if it describes and defines the problem. In reality, diversity is about recognising the needs of individuals within a mass Higher Education system and a system squeezed by the almost complete removal of public funding. Our collective challenge is to find new ways of supporting individual needs within a resource-constrained environment.