Liverpool SU
love student life

Faculty Student Voice Report 2014

SCS – Science

Contents

Welcome 3

Summary of Recommendations 4

Course Reps 5

Student's Experience of their Course 8

Top Ten Academic Priorities 13

Advice 24

Closing Remarks 26

Welcome

Josh McDowell
VP Activities

Dan Cole
VP Community Engagement

Lorraine Sebastian-Francois
VP Academic Equality

Sam Davys
President

This year LiverpoolSU were invited to, and carried out over 30 induction talks during September, reaching thousands of new and returning students in class sizes ranging from less than 20 to hundreds of students at a time. The induction talks are an opportunity to introduce LiverpoolSU to LJMU students, explain how we can help them to love student life, tell students about the benefits of their automatic membership and invite students and teaching staff to ask any questions they have.

We also held Welcome Talks for new students in Halls, reaching hundreds of Level 4 students during move-in weekend. These are a great chance for us to support student orientation and encourage them to speak with their LiverpoolSU Welcome Assistants or Hall Reps if they need any assistance.

On top of this, over 7,000 students have told us their opinions about a variety of topics through our Mini SU's and GOATing activity. This is more than double the number we were able to engage with by this time last year, and we are really proud that our Better Placed model is allowing us to continually improve our student engagement, by speaking to a greater number of students about more issues than ever before.

You'll see through this report that we have gained invaluable insight into what students think about their everyday experience as a student at LJMU. It has been amazing to talk to so many engaged students who clearly want the best out of their education.

The real benefit of this quick gathering of student views through conversation is that it's allowed us to speedily test a number of very quick hypotheses and lets us better understand where we should be focussing our future work and attention.

It is exciting for us to see that through quick conversation with students we are able to spark debate and discussion at every level across the institution; as these reports continue to help us on our journey towards better engagement locally, enabling us to be truly representative. They continue to highlight issues that students care about and suggest ways to support better learning and higher satisfaction.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the feedback we have received from students this semester, from this we have identified some key recommendations that we think will help make LJMU even better. We look forward to working with you to explore the possibility of these happening.

1. Group work assessment guidelines are created, which brings with it a fair and standardised marking criteria.
2. A University wide policy that requires lecture aids and resources to be made available on Blackboard a minimum of 24 hours in advance of lectures is implemented and monitored.
3. Explore ways to give recognition to the effective use of technology in learning, and invest in staff development to support them to do this.
4. Create an expectations agreement, which is set up between LJMU and placement providers, and one between students and staff.
5. Carry out an audit to ensure that all courses at LJMU meet the agreed student staff ratio for LJMU, and where they don't, look to see what can be done to improve this.
6. Carry out an audit at school level to determine the level of demand for specific learning resources, and the access and availability of these for students.
7. Personal Tutor slots to be identified after students' deadlines are set, to fit in with when support is most needed.
8. Dedicated assignment guidance should be offered in induction, where first years are supported with the transition into Higher Education, and further years are refreshed and supported with their transition through University.
9. Explore the possibility for all students to be offered the option to have their timetable available through their University email.
10. Faculties look into ways they can introduce more 'real life' experience and opportunities within their programmes for students to develop their employability.

Course Reps

We believe that the success of the Course Rep Scheme is dependent on a partnership approach between LiverpoolSU and LJMU, which is why we continue to include a dedicated section to the time and resource that we invest in our on-going development of this service. To further aid this, we have set up a Course Rep critical friends group, consisting of LJMU staff from across the University, who we hope will help us to continually develop the support that we provide.

Below you will find a brief overview of the service and support we have offered to Course Reps in the first semester.

ACCREDITATION SCHEME

The most significant change that was made for this year was the introduction of the Course Rep Accreditation Scheme, enabling Course Reps to gain points for activities and meetings that are expected from the voluntary role.

Recognising and rewarding the work of our volunteers is important to us, and we believe that doing so successfully will equip LJMU with students who feel appreciated, supported and more likely to not only continue in their role, but do so effectively.

The activities/meetings they can gain points for are not extra requirements but those already expected of Course Reps. Examples of meetings/activities they can gain accreditation points for are:

- Attending Board of Study meetings
- Attending basic training run by LiverpoolSU
- Attending the new Course Rep Conference
- Nominating in the Amazing Teaching Awards

We hope that this scheme will contribute to improved student engagement in Board of Study meetings and generally with LJMU and LiverpoolSU, and that it continues to grow, and go from strength to strength.

Volunteering England also emphasise that thanking and recognising particularly committed or innovative volunteer contributions will help to maintain morale and ensure volunteers feel supported. In line with this, we would further welcome seeing the contribution of Course Reps reflected within Section Six of the Higher Education Achievement Report, as a result of ongoing conversations with LJMU for future employers to recognise the skills and commitment these students give.

RECRUITMENT

Once again this year, LiverpoolSU asked Programme Leaders to recruit their own Course Reps and to send their names on to the Student Voice Co-ordinators. This year LiverpoolSU has 1,116 students registered as volunteering in the role of Course Reps, a massive increase on the 790 recruited last year.

We supported this process by producing and handing out Course Rep flyers to promote the scheme, as well as attending lectures to talk about the role of a Course Rep, and highlighting the importance of the Course Rep Scheme, the benefits of getting involved and the new Course Rep Accreditation Scheme.

In addition, we aimed to meet as many LJMU staff who have direct responsibility for the success of the Course Rep Scheme as possible. Staff met with new Programme Leaders and attended Programme Leader Away Days to introduce themselves, and talk about the support that we offer and our plans for the year ahead.

Below you will find a break down for the number of Course Reps currently registered with us, per faculty.

FACULTY	NO. OF COURSE REPS
APS	429
EHC	265
EAT	198
SCS	224
TOTAL	**1,116**

We hope that the time spent building relationships with Programme Leaders and administration staff has contributed to this increase in recruitment. Going forward, we are working with administration staff within each faculty to identify courses that have no registered Course Reps, so that we are able to address this. Through our recent Course Rep Review paper, we made the recommendation to increase the number of Course Reps per course to 5%, or at least a 1 in 20 Course Rep to student ratio.

TRAINING

For the first time this year, we ran several smaller training sessions across every campus, as opposed to the one full day event we have previously held in a central location. This was in line with our Better Placed model, which aims to ensure that students are able to access our services and opportunities a lot more easily.

Throughout October we ran six training sessions, across LJMU. This was followed by a series of twelve mop up sessions, covering every faculty throughout a two week period in November, to try and reach Course Reps that we had missed the first time round. The training content covered the roles and responsibilities of a Course Rep and what is expected of them, information around Board of Studies and how Course Reps should expect to be involved and the importance of being representative, as well as practical ways to ensure that they are.

To date we have trained 321 Course Reps, already an increase compared to the 201 Course Reps who attended training last year.

Below you will find a break down for the number of Course Reps that have attended training so far this year, per faculty.

FACULTY	NO. OF TRAINED COURSE REPS
APS	86
EHC	37
EAT	72
SCS	126
TOTAL	**321**

We appreciate and recognise the difficulties in being able to physically attend training, and that no matter what we do; this will always be a barrier for some students. Going forward we have plans to explore the information that is available online, as well as the potential of online training. This will allow for any Course Reps who have missed the training to still be able to benefit, as well as Course Reps who will find physically attending training much harder, such as distance learners and students in partnership colleges.

Feedback from our previous training sessions shows us that Course Reps really enjoy and benefit from the chance to have face to face training and we want to ensure that we still look to offer that opportunity. However, covering the more basic aspects via online provision will enable us to offer the most keen, enthusiastic and engaged Course Reps the chance to have more advanced training and information, whilst still offering an essential level of support to all Course Reps.

In the meantime, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the most relevant faculty staff to identify areas where Course Reps have not been trained, so that we are able to address this.

COURSE REP CONFERENCE

For the first time, this year LiverpoolSU held a Course Rep Conference at the end of the first semester. This was a chance for the Course Reps in attendance to shape our work, including the recommendations made in this report, to learn about the upcoming Quality Audit and our plans for the Student Written Submission. Also included in the conference was a session from LJMU around the work that is being carried out within Student Engagement.

Feedback from the Course Reps who attended was positive, and we look forward to developing this event further in the future.

Students Experience on their Course

LiverpoolSU staff spoke to 270 SCS students about their experience on their course this semester. The students that we spoke to covered 26 of the courses within this faculty, and all 3 schools.

- To find out more about their experience, we asked students the following questions;
- What do you think is good about your course?
- What is it that makes it good? Why does it work for you?
- What do you not like about your course? Why?
- How could your course be improved?

Throughout this section of the report you will see that we have themed the comments we received into the chapters of the NSS, which we hope is useful for the faculty. In addition, we have picked out a number of quotes to demonstrate examples of students who have spoken about particular issues. We'd like to highlight that this does not mean that these issues are only relevant to the courses mentioned, but are representative of a wider issue, and emphasise the issue at hand.

If you would like to see a breakdown of students by course and school, please do not hesitate to contact us.

TEACHING QUALITY

A total of 254 students from SCS provided comments relating to teaching quality. It was really positive to see that so many students have spoken highly of their course when asked 'What do you think is good about your course?', however a significant number of students also identified this as an area for improvement and have commented on how their course could be improved.

Those that identified teaching quality as a positive, named a number of factors that helped bring teaching quality to a good standard. Students particularly focused on the following aspects:

- The balance of practicals to lectures
- Useful and instructive information
- Staff knowledge
- Engaging staff and lectures

A number of student's comments related to the fact that the teaching staff are always approachable, energetic and passionate about their topics. In addition, they praised the variety and quality of lectures.

"This balance gives students a chance to put the theory into practice which is very useful. In addition, lecturers extend on the PowerPoint slides rather than over-relying on them. Students are made feel like their time in class is very worthwhile and lecture notes are often provided before the class giving students a chance to fully prepare."

Level 4, Animal Behaviour

"They are published researchers and this expert knowledge and passion for the subject really shines through in their teaching."

Level 6, Applied Psychology

"My lecturers are very passionate about the subject which shows in their teaching and makes lectures very interesting. Lecturers explain concepts in good detail and ensure that the class understands the content. The class is also very interactive."

Level 5 Biology

"I find her lecturers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject. Also finds teaching enjoyable and stimulating particularly with the other courses. Her lecturers are helpful when it comes to careers advice and in using their own experience to guide students."

Level 5, Wildlife Conservation

"The different learning styles make the course well-structured and gives us a good balance between independent and class learning. The lecturers are approachable and help you out. The mixing of courses widens your social circle and means you get to learn different things from each other."

Level 5, Zoology

Unsurprisingly, where lecturers fail to demonstrate these factors students become dissatisfied with the teaching quality. Student comments predominantly focussed on the lack of engagement as one of the main areas for improvement. In particular students referred to over reliance on PowerPoint slides and disinterested teaching, content and the consistency of the teaching quality they were receiving.

"I wish standard of teaching was consistent across my modules as I feel some lecturers aren't as good as the others. Also I find that some of the lectures tend to ramble on and go off the subject area which is frustrating."

Level 5, Biology

"Not all lecturers are as interesting and interactive during class. Some of them tend to over-rely on PowerPoint slides which can be boring."

Level 4, MPharm

"I think they should make some lectures interactive as they can get boring and tedious to take in information effectively"

Level 6, Biochemistry

LiverpoolSU believe a high standard of teaching quality is integral to a positive student experience, and we have recognised this through its inclusion in our Top Ten Academic Priorities, which you can read more about later in this report.

Students also spoke to us about seminars and the contact time these provide with lectures. Student comments suggested that the model of lectures being followed by seminars, or having smaller class sizes was a positive aspect of their course. Students highlighted that more contact time and having the opportunity to discuss lecture topics would improve their academic experience.

"More intimate lectures with fewer students rather than giant groups. This is already the case on level 6, but it would be appreciated on other levels."

Level 6, Sport and Exercise Science

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

53 students in total provided responses on assessment and feedback, however only a small number of these were presented in a positive way. Where students did speak positively, the feedback was generally surrounding the variety of assessment.

"Being assessed in different ways is good because it meant that even if I don't do well in written exams I can excel in presentations and group projects and bring my grade back up."

Foundation, Natural Science

Students talked about how the quality of feedback needed to be improved, they mentioned how they would like feedback earlier on so that they have time to improve before the next assessment. They also added that the feedback received is often very generic, mentioning that personalised feedback would be much more constructive.

"The feedback that we have been given is very generic. Many students got the same comment."

Level 6, Psychology

"There seems to be a non-consistent marking scheme. Your mark depends on who is marking it, which isn't fair."

Level 5, Pharmacy

"Need have more feedback at the beginning of the course to help further on."

Level 6, Biomedical Science

A number of students raised the issue of assessment bunching. They stated that often there was miscommunication between lecturers resulting in clashes in assessment across modules.

"The work seems to be very close together and not as spaced out as it could be."

Level 4, Geography

"The structure of how work is assessed. I.e. Most of the work load has been left to the end of semester one."

Level 6, ACAPS

Due to the frequency with which students talk to us about assessment bunching as an issue across the university, we have identified it as one of our Top Ten Priorities for this year.

Further comments related to the support and guidance provided for assessments highlight students feeling there is much room for improvement.

"Poor communication about what is expected on assessments."

Level 6, Biomedical Science

"Assessment was not rescheduled after a fire alarm, so now students are being given estimated grades. We think this is unfair."

Level 6, Biomedical Science

ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

A total of 234 students' feedback comments related to organisation and management. Whilst a large number of these were positive, it was unfortunate to see that the majority were construed negatively.

The most popular theme in this category was focussed on the organisation of the course. In this instance, the organisation refers to students' satisfaction, or dissatisfaction with; the relevance of the lecture content or the options of modules available to them.

"I like that the course isn't just lecture based - we do a lot of practicals and field trips. We get to develop skills and study in an interactive way."

Level 5, Zoology

"Modules have good, interesting content, especially developmental as it is relevant to me."

Level 4, Applied Psychology

A number of students also commented that they found the content of their lectures either boring or the planning of their lectures or fieldwork needed much improvement.

"For there to be more guidance as to what is expected from students on field trips and how they actually relate to the course content and further career."

Level 4, Animal Behaviour

The second most popular theme in this category was timetabling, with 74 students talking to us about how it could be improved. This included issues around long days with little breaks, not having Wednesday afternoons off and long breaks in between lectures.

"In first year I missed a lot of workshops as a result of not being able to fully understand the timetable. I felt that my lecturers weren't very supportive and this has affected my learning this year."

Level 5, Biology

"Better organisation is needed, particularly with regards timetabling and for more support understanding these things at the start of first year."

Level 5, Biology

"Condense the gaps in the timetable so that we don't have to travel into town for one session."

Level 4, MPharm

"Lectures on a Wednesday means that I can't play for a sports team and I feel like I'm missing out with the university experience."

Level 4, Pharmacy

Additionally, LiverpoolSU would like to highlight good practice that has been brought to our attention from the Faculty of Arts, Professional and Social Studies.

"Having our timetables put in to our university email means we can sync it onto our phones. Awesome! The timetable is flexible and when it gets changed we get notified on our phones! Best thing that ever happened!"

Level 6, Architecture student

We would strongly recommend that the faculty investigate this further and find out if it is possible to disseminate this practice university wide.

We are aware that there is a wealth of reasons for why and how timetabling can be improved for students, however this is also not a new area of concern. Due to this, LiverpoolSU have made it one of our Top Ten Priorities.

Students also suggested that poor communication both between staff and between staff and students could be detrimental to them.

We appreciate that LJMU is heavily investing in developing timetabling, and would welcome this practice being disseminated across the board, where possible.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Personal development was identified as a positive area across the faculty, with 20 students highlighting ways in which lecturers are helping to improve their career aspects. The majority of these students talked about the 'real life' experiences they can gain from the course.

"We are always told what are strengths are and told which choices will lead us to what kind of roles."

Level 6, Psychology

Due to the current economic climate it is safe to assume that this level of interest from students is not going to subside any time soon. In order to respond to this demand LiverpoolSU proposes that the Faculty look into ways they can introduce more opportunities in the programmes for students to learn the relevant knowledge and gain appropriate experience within their chosen field.

LEARNING RESOURCES

Not many students spoke to us about learning resources, however, those that did mainly spoke positively, and stated the facilities in labs are good.

"I like that we get a chance to use different equipment - such as microscopes. We always have classes explaining them and sheets talking us through what to do with them. Using the equipment is good practice and the support makes me feels confident in using it."

Level 5, Animal Behaviour

"The balance between theory and practical is good. This balance gives students a chance to put the theory into practice which is very useful."

Level 4, Animal Behaviour

It is positive to see that students feel there is a good balance of theory and practical. Other student comments suggested that some of the facilities needs improvement.

"Make the computer and printer availability more public."

Level 6, Animal Behaviour

"Specific software (API Codes) is only available on the computers in one lab so it can be difficult to access for a lot of people at once."

Level 5, Biochemistry

Effective utilisation of Blackboard is another of our Top Ten Priorities.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Academic support was not something that students spoke to us about in great numbers, however we felt that the comments we did receive were worth mentioning. A total of 40 comments were made, and it was great to see how many of these were positive.

Students commented on the positive support they receive from academic staff; be that from their assigned personal tutor or teaching staff from their course. Students highlighted a number of qualities that these staff possess; approachability, responsiveness, accessibility, friendliness and contactable.

"Lecturer's give good assignment support and always make themselves available if students need additional support."

Level 6, Biomedical Science

"I love my personal tutor - she's so supportive and I feel I can approach her with anything."

Level 4, Pharmacy

"My course works for me because I like have advice and guidance especially when dealing with difficult assignments."

Level 6, Forensic Science

Some of the downfalls came where students mentioned that they felt their personal tutor either doesn't support them, support isn't offered quickly enough or they don't feel that the Course Rep role is taken seriously enough.

"More support offered quickly as I've tried to meet without my tutor about work issues and had to wait two weeks."

Level 5, Biochemistry

"Student doesn't feel like her personal tutor is very supportive and is often made feel like she is bothering her. In some of the emails her PT has been quite rude and blunt which can be very off-putting."

Level 5, Zoology

"Staff don't take course reps seriously enough."

Level 6, ACAPS

Personal Tutoring has been identified as another one of LiverpoolSU's Top Ten Priorities.

Top Ten Academic Priorities

Our Top Ten Priorities for the year outlines our commitment to Higher Education in the light of a fast changing landscape. Our priorities were chosen based on evidence gained from Faculty Student Voice Reports, and the consistency with which they came up across all faculties, and academic years.

We recognise that there are a number of changes have been made in previous years to improve these areas, and that LJMU has a number of existing policies in place. However, with students continuing to raise these areas in a negative light, it is clear that there is still work to be done to improve the student experience. This may be monitoring existing policies, to ensure that they are happening in practice, or exploring new ideas about what other changes could be made to improve these areas.

The ten priorities, in no particular order, are:

- Assessment bunching
- Timetabling
- Group Work
- Blackboard
- Feedback
- IT access and suitability
- Communication
- Teaching Quality
- Placements
- Personal Tutors

To deliver on these we must reach a consensus at all levels of the University as to the importance of these priorities and how they are best delivered upon. LiverpoolSU believes that the priorities identified above can differentiate between a good academic experience and an excellent one and each year we will be working with students to create solutions to the issues that they continue to raise, which will be presented as recommendations via our Faculty Student Voice Reports. Successful implementation of these recommendations should ensure that LJMU is providing the educational experience that their students now demand, and deserve.

Below you will find an overview that puts each priority into context; we will then expand on the three areas that we have explored in more depth this term.

ASSESSMENT BUNCHING

Students across all faculties raise concerns, year on year, about assessment bunching and the impact this can cause.

NUS research into learning and teaching also showed a desire for more spread out assessment. When students were asked whether or not they agreed that staggering assessment, rather than assessment loading/bunching throughout the term would benefit their course, 68.8% of students agreed to some extent, whilst only 5% disagreed.

Assessment mapping was shared as good practice from the Liverpool Screen School in the APS FSVR, Dec 2012 and put forward as a recommendation to other faculties in subsequent years.

LiverpoolSU's Top 10 Priorities paper from June 2013 raised assessment mapping as a priority

area; a tool that should be implemented across the University. It would allow staff to acknowledge all the deadlines that students' face in the incoming academic year, and identify where bunching occurs. This process would ensure staff have sufficient time to reschedule assessment deadlines where there are periods of intense assessment bunching.

Tackling this issue would alleviate unnecessary pressure placed on students, give a more holistic view of all work required of students within the academic year and allow Personal Tutors to provide additional support around stressful periods.

TIMETABLING

Timetabling was considered as a priority in June 2013 Top 10 Priorities Paper, with student concerns focussed on the availability of timetables, their structure and the length of breaks. Due to the regular occurrence of this topic, LiverpoolSU has once again made it a priority area.

Breaks were highlighted as a University-wide issue in the Dec 2013 FSVR's. Two extremes appeared in those reports, either that students were in for a long day with minimal time for breaks or they started early, finished late with a 3 hour break in between; neither were seen as preferable to students.

To help resolve some of the issues surrounding timetabling, LiverpoolSU recommends that LJMU provide students with personalised timetables, that they receive four weeks prior to the start of term. This would allow all students, particularly those working and with childcare responsibilities, more time to arrange commitments outside of University and forward plan for the academic year.

We are aware that the University has established a timetabling steering group, and the objectives of this group should serve to address many of the problems that students talk to us about. We look forward to being a part of this group and exploring student opinion further, to ensure the outcomes of this meeting best serve their interests.

GROUP WORK

We understand that group work can play a key role in the curriculum, and that when implemented effectively, can equip students with a host of extremely helpful employability benefits. However, students continue to talk to us about their dissatisfaction with group work as a form of assessment.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to this dissatisfaction; the organisation and support given to group work, the ways in which group work is assessed, how students receive feedback on their work, and the additional pressure this form of assessment can bring.

LiverpoolSU's Top 10 Priorities paper from June 2013 included group work as an area to be prioritised by LJMU; as it is an area students still feel strongly about. It is appreciated that group work is a necessary assessment tool, but it appears that more guidance needs to be offered to students surrounding the dynamics of working in a group successfully and provisions put in place for when contribution within the team is not evenly distributed.

Students' concerns regularly identify the marking process and how much this can impact on their final grade, particularly when group work is present at level 6.

In 2013, LiverpoolSU recommended that LJMU should investigate group working practices that allow for students to be individually marked and also allow for students to identify others who have not contributed fully to each team.

Through their website, the Higher Education Academy provide resources, created by the Subject Centre for Physical Sciences, which discusses the benefits of group work and suggests practical ways in which to assess it; one of the suggestions allows for individual marks to be allocated. We would be interested in working with relevant University staff to see how and what could be transferrable across LJMU.

BLACKBOARD

In 2010, NUS produced a report on *Student Perspectives on Technology*, which looked at the perspective, demand and training needs of both current higher education students, and prospective students in FE. This report discussed technology and how its effective use in learning and teaching comes with an array of benefits. They give an opportunity to refresh teaching methods, and also act as a starting point for more flexible, personal and improved learning environments.

However, it also highlighted that many students felt that Virtual Learning Environments are only intermittently updated and do not contain useful and effective content. In line with the findings of this research, students at LJMU recognise that Blackboard is a useful resource to have and would like to see it utilised more efficiently. Our Question of the Month conversations carried out in December 2013 illustrate that across the University, Blackboard supports students' learning.

Students spoke a lot about the need for lecture aids to be online before a lecture takes place, which has been a previous recommendation from our Faculty Student Voice Reports.

Much of the case against this being implemented centres around the belief that it will result in more students not attending lectures. We do not believe that this would or should be the case. LiverpoolSU firmly believes that no student would be able to take the same level of knowledge and insight from a set of notes that they would from attending a lecture. As such, uploading lecture notes online before a lecture should be viewed as a benefit to aid a students learning and enrich the academic experience of those students who want to make the very best of their time at University.

We would be interested to learn more about the support that is currently given to lecturers to ensure Blackboard is used as a positive tool, which can support students' independent learning during their time at LJMU, as well as where this can be improved further.

FEEDBACK

LiverpoolSU has been working with the University to make feedback better for all students for a number of years.

In March 2010, we produced a consultation document '*10 ways for LJMU to make feedback better for students'.* We took this to LJMU's Academic Board and upon approval of the recommended objectives; we then met with the University to discuss how to implement it.

By September 2010, the University had agreed to implement four of our objectives, which were:

- Student assessment deadlines published alongside University feedback deadlines
- Feedback available within 15 working days after the assessment deadline
- Feedback directly relating to the assessment criteria
- Entitlement to face-to-face feedback on students' first piece of assessed work

As a result of our partnership work, the FSVR's illustrate that over the year's students comments regarding the timeliness of feedback are noticeably declining. We anticipate this is due to the 15 working day feedback turn around becoming embedded within LJMU, and thank staff members who have helped with the process.

However, we are unfortunately continuing to see a variation in the quality of feedback students are receiving across LJMU.

Over the past few years students have continued to talk to us about the quality of feedback, and in December 2013 LiverpoolSU highlighted it as a University wide issue for students in the termly FSVR's.

LiverpoolSU stresses once again how important it is for students to receive good quality feedback for their academic progression, and asks LJMU to encourage the sharing of good practice across the institution.

We are excited to have been asked to be part of a student-led University wide project, addressing feedback and changes that need to be made. We look forward to reporting back on our progress with this and the group recommendations for improvement.

IT ACCESS AND SUITABILITY

As an issue, this can often tend to be more course specific, with students needing access to different resources dependant on their course requirements.

The FSVR's in December 2013 illustrated that students University wide feel there are not enough learning resources available to them across campus; mainly in the form of computers and labs. The feedback within the report demonstrated that even when LJMU does offer course specific resources and equipment, students believe their accessibility is limited.

LiverpoolSU would recommended that an audit is carried out at school level to determine the level of demand for all specific learning resources, and the access and availability of these for students.

With regards to IT access, LiverpoolSU will continue to work with LJMU and library services as a critical friend to ensure students' needs are meet with regards to IT access across the University.

COMMUNICATION

In previous FSVR's student feedback has highlighted the lack of communication regarding cancellation of lectures, or room changes. However, with the implementation of the text messaging service, LiverpoolSU feels this should help alleviate the issue.

Internal communication between teams or across joint honours courses is where students are receiving a low standard of service. In certain areas there appears to be a lack of consistency in the information being provided to students, resulting in unnecessary confusion.

LiverpoolSU recommends that staff liaise with each other to ensure the same message is being sent out and that students do not face any confusion, especially where joint honours students are involved.

TEACHING QUALITY

Excellence in teaching is something that we believe is fundamental to a positive student experience at University, and we welcome LJMU recognising it as a priority for 2014/15. To support this, 5 years ago we introduced the Amazing Teaching Awards. The idea was to allow students to nominate individuals and areas that they feel have made a positive impact on their University experience. For us, the reasoning behind this was simple; too often the student voice focuses on those things that should be better. As a Union we don't exist to be critical, but to help LJMU achieve excellence. We wanted to give students the chance to show that excellence in teaching is appreciated and definitely exists at LJMU.

We further welcome LJMU's emphasis on sharing good practice through teaching observations and staff participation in the HEA. Students in past FSVR's have provided a wealth of feedback on how academics successfully and unsuccessfully engage them during lectures. Previous FSVR's have highlighted engaging students, staff student ratios and contact time as issues for them.

Students really value good teaching. They will remember someone who has enhanced their University experience for the rest of their lives. Research, locally at LJMU and nationally, shows that there is a clear desire for students to have a more personalised higher education experience. They want more contact time with tutors and their peers, more keynote speakers, and to feel like they are part of the academic community, not just a passive recipient of education.

Recent NUS and QAA research has identified that students consider teaching skills the most important feature of good quality learning and teaching. Students consistently talk about wanting more interactive classes, not only to learn, but also to develop peer relationships, which they linked to future employability skills.

The research shows us that, when thinking about the learning and teaching experience at University, lecturers' teaching skills were by far seen as the most important. Around 90% of students rated this as important or very important.

The next most important factors nationally were interactive group teaching sessions and tutorials, and library support. Of least importance was the availability of internet discussion forums.

Smaller groups, seminars, practicals and interactivity were all highlighted as something respondents wanted more of. This is reflected locally through our Teaching Awards, where student nominations talk about lecturers who are interesting, well informed and passionate. Students love the use of technology and resources and they highly rate staff who are helpful. They tell us about staff who apply their lectures to real life and use examples to ignite student interest. This was also highlighted in the June 2013 Top 10 Paper, where feedback indicated that students appreciate seminars and small group learning and given the choice would prefer either more seminars, more seminar-style lectures, or just better staff student ratios.

Students tell us that they liked interactive and engaging teaching and teachers who were enthusiastic, approachable and good communicators. Students talk passionately about the need for learning to be interesting and dynamic. Students talked to us about their desire to be involved, how they disliked just being talked at and that they wanted more from a lecture than just being given a handout. They also wanted the opportunity to express their opinions, hear the views of other students and discuss different interpretations.

The concern around the number of students per lecture and seminar was raised as a University wide issue in the December 2013 FSVR.

LiverpoolSU are aware of the Inspire model being introduced, and we are interested to see the positive impact it has for students.

In August 2013, QAA released guidance about explaining class sizes to students, in light of their findings that 70% of students surveyed linked the size of the class with a high quality learning experience. This was ranked as third most important below teaching skills (91%) and interactive group sessions (83%), and as such it is important to address all areas, and not improve one at the expense of another.

In the guidance provided by the QAA, they outline that when publishing information for students, the University should consider:

- Presenting class size as an aspect of the collective delivery methods for a specific course
- Stating the ways in which teaching and learning are facilitated, and by whom
- Specifying in pre-entry course information, how effective learning is supported by sufficient provision of specialist resources, suitable class sizes, and the availability of resources

Students placed a large emphasis on interesting teaching. Results from surveys like the NSS tell us that boring lectures continue to be a challenge. When students told us about the importance of teaching being interesting, they closely linked 'interest' with lecturers who they believed had strong subject knowledge and who were good communicators. Subject knowledge came up a number of times and was often linked to confidence, commitment and enthusiasm. Students like staff who enjoy what they are teaching and who love what they do. They like a lecturer to be a specialist in their subject, to have experience of their subject in the working world, and to be approachable, accessible, passionate and organised. They wanted their lectures to be interactive, use technology and visual aids and have a sense of humour.

We often hear hesitation around the idea of students talking about personalities, but personalities are important when "staff are enthusiastic" is rated in the NSS. Students aren't asking for a new best friend who can make them laugh on demand, all of our feedback shows that they just want to be treated as people.

In contrast, the NUS and QAA research shows students identify a poor teacher as someone who is unconfident, a poor communicator, i.e. just reading their lecture notes, unprofessional (specifically swearing), patronising, not encouraging, and who overloads students with information and assumes too much knowledge of their students.

The responses also illustrated that good communication skills, enthusiasm and dynamic delivery are a vital part of excellent teaching. Students spoke about humour, compassion and patience, and the desire to be treated like an adult. Approachability of teachers featured heavily in responses. Students expressed a desire to feel comfortable talking to their lecturers about additional support or queries.

WORK THIS SEMESTER

This semester we decided to focus on two of our Top Ten Priorities, to dig deeper into student opinion about the subject, we looked at Placements and Personal Tutors; you will find greater detail about these two areas below.

PLACEMENTS

Placements are an invaluable experience and for many students an essential part of their University course. However, local and national research has shown that when things go wrong it can taint their entire student experience. Often issues that already exist are exacerbated by the stress of being on placement, but we also know that sometimes it is issues with the placement itself. Over the last few years students have been telling LiverpoolSU that there are a number of factors that can hinder this experience.

LiverpoolSU have selected the top four most talked about issues surrounding placements at LJMU, which are:

- Availability of information prior to placement
- Expectations of placements
- Timing of placements
- Support whilst on placement

These concerns fall in line with national research carried out by NUS around students on placement, which focussed more specifically on professional students.

Given the size of placements as an issue, we asked LJMU students to help us prioritise which of the four, should be LiverpoolSU's number one priority to begin with and why. We spoke to 1,098 students from across the University about their placement experiences and 905 of these students voted.

Students voted for the following issues as their number one priority:

1. Availability of information prior to placement – 442 votes
2. Support whilst on placement – 229 votes
3. Expectations of placements – 126 votes
4. Timing of placements – 108 votes

Availability of information prior to placement

This was voted by students as the area LiverpoolSU should prioritise first when it came to placement issues. It is unsurprising when this topic covers a variety of factors that students would class as 'prior information', and how receiving this information within good time can alleviate additional stress and worry.

"No information given, expected to go find a place, so we need to know more information on placements that we could go on, non-local students don't know the area and schools so they need at least a compiled list of where previous students have been and work experience placements procedure needs to be made clearer"

Early Childhood Studies Student

"We're due on placement in a couple of weeks and still haven't got our uniforms or details of our placements. This has made planning childcare and arranging part time work commitments very difficult"

Adult Nursing Student

It is important to note that the feedback we received was not all negative, and it was clear that there was much good practice that existed across the institution. Students spoke positively about opportunities such as 'Employers Day' and the value that they place on being able to go on placement.

"Placements are talked about all the time and feels like I can go to my lecturers all the time which is really useful. We've been given a booklet on what to do on placement and I'm feeling prepared"

Education Studies and Early Years Student

With students identifying this as their area for priority, we would welcome the opportunity to work with LJMU on solutions for improvement.

Support whilst on placement

Students, who provided written feedback regarding placement priorities, mentioned that support on placement was important to them. Student feedback indicated that there was a mixed batch of experiences of support whilst on placement from across the University.

"Mentor assigned to visit three times a year which I found very helpful!"

Level 5, IT and Multimedia Computing Student

"Adequate support for placement within University time. However, placements outside University time does not get any support"

MPharm student

Students also spoke about how the quality of support they receive usually reduces when there has been a lack of communication and student expectations are not met, either from the placement or the University.

"Would like to see more communication between placement providers and University as some placements don't expect students when they turn up"

Level 5, MPharm Student

"Staff failed on communication and support. Felt let down that my tutor didn't visit when we had been told during the whole of second year that they were going to do so"

Byrom Street Student

Expectations of placement

When analysing student feedback there where some similarities when it came to 'support whilst on placement' and 'expectations of placement'. This was mainly to do with the different requirements on the students, lecturers or placement providers.

"Unprepared last year, sent too early with little training"

Education Studies and Early Years Student

"I didn't know what to expect when I got there which was frustrating as I went to Italy for it"

Level 6, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Student

"The placement knew I was coming but was not prepared and did not know what I was supposed to be doing. Luckily they matched me up with a staff member the second week that really made the placement better"

Level 5, Coaching and Development Student

Students also suggested that creating an expectations agreement between LJMU and placement providers, and one between students, staff and placement providers, would form a base for clarifying and understanding the roles for all parties involved

As one student alluded to, a booklet for placement providers on what is required of students would be a good starting point, LiverpoolSU would like all students to be provided with a placement handbook. Fact files on each placement provider would allow students to gain the basic information on their temporary place of work. These would contain information such as; the location, how to get there, a key named contact, previous students experiences, what opportunities are available, giving students a starting point.

Timing of placement

When students were asked about the timing of their placement there were numerous reasons for why it was good and also how it could be improved.

"Feel it would be better to do the placement after first year, as learnt things that would have helped in 2nd year"

Business Studies Student

"The placement had good timing which will help for when I do my dissertation because I won't be worrying about placements as well!"

Level 5, IT and Multimedia Computing Student

"Maybe have the placements later in the year, such as in January, as it was difficult to go straight from summer break into placement without very strong communication with the uni"

Level 5, Coaching and Development Student

LiverpoolSU suggests module leaders utilise student feedback from the course and gain insight from Course Reps to determine where improvements can be made, and implement where possible. If there is a reason amendments cannot be changed, communicate this to the students as it is important to have transparency to a process that can be somewhat complex.

Additional Comments

There were a number of comments that fell outside the top four topics selected. These mainly focussed on how positive an experience a placement had been or simply that students wanted the opportunity to go on placement, which didn't require them to take a year away from University to complete one.

"We don't get any work experience support or opportunities as part of the course except for the option to take a year out work experience programme"

Architectural Technology Student

"Not had much information delivered to us about the different types of placements we can get ourselves involved with to enhance our learning and overall grade"

Level 5, Criminology Student

It is unsurprising that students want the opportunity to go out on placement; with lecturers and employers talking about how important experience is, students know that having a degree is no longer the only currency in securing a job.

"I loved the placement so grateful for the experience and would recommend everyone do it!"

Byrom Street Student

LiverpoolSU proposes that LJMU look into ways they can introduce more opportunities in the programmes for students to learn the relevant knowledge and gain appropriate experience within their chosen field.

PERSONAL TUTORS

We spoke to 423 students across all four faculties, asking them about the Personal Tutor system. We asked the students four different questions which have been broken down below.

"What works well with your Personal Tutor?"

When asked what worked well with their Personal Tutor, students spoke about four main areas; accessibility, consistency, knowledge, and rapport.

Accessibility

Students have told us that accessibility to their Personal Tutor is important to them. It was pleasing to hear that generally students feel that their Personal Tutors are easy to contact and nearly always respond quickly to emails in order to set up meetings.

"Our tutors are always available and email us back whenever we need them"

Level 6 student, Mental Health Nursing

In further positive feedback, the majority of students told us that they know where to find their Personal Tutor and many of them have an open door policy, meaning that they know where to find them and are very approachable. Another point that students have raised is that where they have regular meetings, their Personal Tutor is able to help them stay on track and manage their sometimes heavy workloads.

Consistency

Accessibility and consistency often go hand-in-hand and so many students spoke to us about the importance of both together. Consistency to students generally refers to having the same Personal Tutor throughout their time at LJMU and they expressed that this was important to them.

"They're accessible, so I know where to find them. They've stayed the same throughout three years so they know us but we also have the option to change if we want to."

Level 6, Midwifery

Knowledge

Personal Tutors being knowledgeable and being able to answer queries was an important feature when it comes to what works well for students with the Personal Tutoring system. The following statement demonstrates this:

"My tutor this year has an in depth knowledge of the course which is good as she can answer any questions and queries I have. As last year my personal tutor was from a different course completely and knew nothing about civil engineering which made it seem pointless having a personal tutor in the first place as if I had any questions about anything I would go see my lecturers instead of my tutor."

Level 6, Civil Engineering

Students feel that their Personal Tutors need to have a wealth of knowledge about not only the course but also about other aspects of student life. The research we conducted found that students feel the Personal Tutor system works well as they are able to go to their Personal Tutor for detailed and helpful advice on research, presentations and prospects after graduation.

Rapport

The relationship a student builds up with their Personal Tutor is paramount. This came across strongly as the most commonly mentioned response when students were asked about what works well with the system.

This again linked with students telling us that they enjoy having the same Personal Tutor for their entire time at University, allowing them to build up a good relationship.

"He understands my strengths and weaknesses as an individual well and knows which curricular activities I need to focus on to improve."

Level 6, Business and Public Relations

"They were there last year through personal issues; I don't feel I would have been able to get through the year without their support."

Level 7, Adult Medicine

Talking to students has shown us that Personal Tutors are able to build a good relationship with their students by always responding to emails, being organised and motivated, keeping their students best interests at the forefront and proactively checking the progress of their students.

"He meets up with me regularly and is always really positive with his feedback. He is pro-active in arranging meetings and will contact me if he's not seen me for a while around University."

Level 6, Wildlife Conservation

A reoccurring theme in building good relationships was that for many students, their Personal Tutor is also one of their lecturers, enabling them to feel comfortable in approaching them. A few students also mentioned that they had small tutorials to begin with which meant they gained the confidence needed to ask for help.

"My Personal Tutor has been the same since first year which has meant that I have built up a good rapport with them. They really made an effort in first year to get to know all the students in our group and is friendly and approachable. Our Personal Tutor arranges PDP sessions throughout the year to check on all of us and makes sure we aren't having any problems on the course. I would describe her as going 'above and beyond' to support me during my 3 years at University."

Level 6, Criminology and Psychology

It was concerning to speak to almost 80 students, who either didn't know who their Personal Tutor is, or who have had little contact with them. Many students also told us that they have had a different Personal Tutor every year, and so receive an inconsistent experience.

What do you think your personal tutor should support you with?

This was the second question we asked, and responses from students mainly centred on four aspects they felt were most important. These were assessment and feedback, employability, personal issues and course related issues.

Assessment and Feedback

With regards to assessment and feedback, students felt that their Personal Tutor should be helping them with their dissertation and other assignments, including exam preparation and essay planning. We also found that students would like more support and constructive feedback after receiving their work and grades.

"They should support us with essays such as feedback on drafts of work and after essay support in order to improve"

Level 6, Dance

Employability

The students we spoke to put a big emphasis on their Personal Tutors supporting them with their careers and life after graduation. This included career guidance for students in their final year and helping their students to perfect their CV's. We also found a significant weight was placed on postgraduate study, where students wanted to be informed of their career options, and also directing them to further options in the Personal Tutors field of study. Comments about work experience, placement and internship applications and creating connections featured regularly throughout the responses.

Personal Issues

Personal issues were also something that students felt their Personal Tutors should support them with. Many stated that the Personal Tutor should have an aspect of pastoral care as well as supporting them academically, especially if their personal issues were affecting their course or professional life. This could involve signposting students to the relevant services LJMU and LiverpoolSU offers.

"Your Personal Tutor should be there to help out all round - to help with any problems and give advice on where to go and what to do. We would only discuss personal problems if they directly affected my course but other students may feel differently."

Level 6, Mental Health Nursing

Course Related Issues

Students felt that their Personal Tutors should support them with course related issues. This could be anything course related including subject or theory knowledge, placements and any issues affecting a students' performance.

"They provide a deadline sheet of where students should be up to before the personal tutor meeting so they can effectively evaluate their performance and it gives meetings direction."

Level 5, Adult Nursing

Students also wanted their Personal Tutor to help them make the most out of their time at University and to help them obtain the highest grade possible to them.

"I want my Personal Tutor to provide advice on getting the most out of our course and the highest grade possible."

Level 6, Law

Finally we asked students "Is there anything you would like to see your Personal Tutor support you with that they currently do not?" and "How often would you like to meet with your Personal Tutor?"

You can see the responses to these questions in the following tables:

"Is there anything you would you like to see your personal tutor support you with, that they currently do not?"

YES	NO
195	228

"How often would you like to meet your personal tutor?"

ANSWER	NO. OF RESPONDENTS
Once a semester	52
Bi-monthly	20
Monthly	84
Fortnightly	70
Weekly	76
Daily	1
On Demand	47
Never	3

In January 2015 we will be attending an event being hosted by the Centre for Recording Achievement, who are running a one-day seminar on "Models and Methods for 21st Century Tutoring". The event will bring together academics, support staff, sector agencies and students' union officers and staff to discuss what personal tutoring should look like in the 21st century. This will help us to shape our continuing work and understanding around personal tutoring and what will help LJMU students get the best from the support available to them.

Going forward we would be interested in working with LJMU to look at, and possibly review the Personal Tutor job description, and any policy that currently exists as to how the scheme should work. Additionally we would welcome the opportunity to work together to create a pack for staff who have been given the role, and one for students, so that they both understand what the role of a Personal Tutor is, and what level of support they can expect.

Advice

As a new addition to our Faculty Student Voice Reports, we are pleased to present data from our Advice service, which will now be included on a termly basis. Going forward we look forward to developing this further, and will be able to provide descriptive detail, where key themes and trends are emerging across the faculty and the University.

Below you will find a breakdown of the cases that we have dealt with from the 1st September 2014 to 7th December 2014. This will give you a brief overview of the issues that students are coming to us for support with, and a course specific breakdown is available on request.

Faculty of Arts, Professional and Social Studies

We dealt with a total of 44 cases from students within the APS faculty. Further breakdown can be found below:

ISSUE	TOTAL NUMBER
Appeals	6
Extenuating Circumstances	2
Course Transfers (within institution)	2
University Disciplinary	1
Asked to Withdraw	17
Temporary Withdrawal from course	1
Changing/Leaving Course	1
UK Student Funding	1
Complaints	1
Contract Advice	1
General Advice	6
Not Known	1

Faculty of Science

We dealt with a total of 35 cases from students within the Science faculty. Further breakdown can be found below:

ISSUE	TOTAL NUMBER
Asked to Withdraw	27
General Advice	2
Complaints	1
Extenuating Circumstances	2
Appeals	1
University Disciplinary	1
OIA	1

Faculty of Engineering and Technology

We dealt with a total of 37 cases from students within the EAT faculty. Further breakdown can be found below:

ISSUE	TOTAL NUMBER
Asked to Withdrawn	14
General Advice	6
Appeals	6
Complaints	7
Extenuating Circumstances	2
Temporary Withdrawal	1
University Disciplinary	1

Faculty of Education, Health and Community

We dealt with a total of 22 cases from students within the EHC faculty. Further breakdown can be found below:

ISSUE	TOTAL NUMBER
Asked to Withdraw	7
Appeals	2
Course Related Advice	1
Extenuating Circumstances	2
Resits/Repeat Year	1
Fitness to practice	3
General Advice	5

Closing Remarks

We'd like to thank everyone that helped us to prepare this report and we look forward to working with the Faculty and students to create and action plan around the recommendations we've identified.

Next semester we would like to provide an impact and improvement report for Course Reps and students on a wider level, based on the feedback they have given us. As such, if you have any thoughts or questions, or would like to provide a response to students, we'd love to hear them.

If you have any comments on this report, or its contents, or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact Becci Heard who is based in the Students' Union located at **John Foster Building, 80-98 Mount Pleasant**, via telephone on **0151 231 4942** or via email on **R.Heard@ljmu.ac.uk.**

Liverpool SU
love student life

Contact us:

liverpoolsu.com

Liverpool Students' Union

@liverpoolsu

0151 231 4900

studentsunion@ljmu.ac.uk

instagram.com/liverpoolsu