



Faculty of Science

December 2013



Faculty Student Voice Report

Introduction

It's a privilege to present the most recent version of our Faculty Student Voice Report for the Faculty of Science to the faculty's Education Committee.

As a students' union we pride ourselves on ensuring that all students have their voices heard. We believe that Course Reps are an essential part of this, whilst at the same time we also believe that going direct to students about some of the most important issues that the university is working on at the moment is fundamental to ensuring excellence in the LJMU student experience.

This is why we have restructured the reports slightly, giving you updates on all the relevant work we have done as a union since September 2013 whilst also continuing to provide individual student comments. We very much hope that you find that the report adds significant value to your work and that it highlights areas of good practice in the faculty as well as areas that are in need of attention.

It's worth saying that the only reason we do this is because we share the same passion for improving the student experience as you do, and we believe wholeheartedly that decisions made with students as active partners will result in far better outcomes.

As always if you have any questions or comments about these reports please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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LiverpoolSU Sabbatical Officers 2013-14
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A note on student quotes in this report

Throughout this document we use quotes from students to evidence many of our arguments. Please note that all comments are taken from students across the university and are representative of the issue at large. The chosen quotes are simply meant to indicate how this issue affects students' lives and their levels of satisfaction with LJMU. If you require further examples of student quotes please do not hesitate to get in touch.

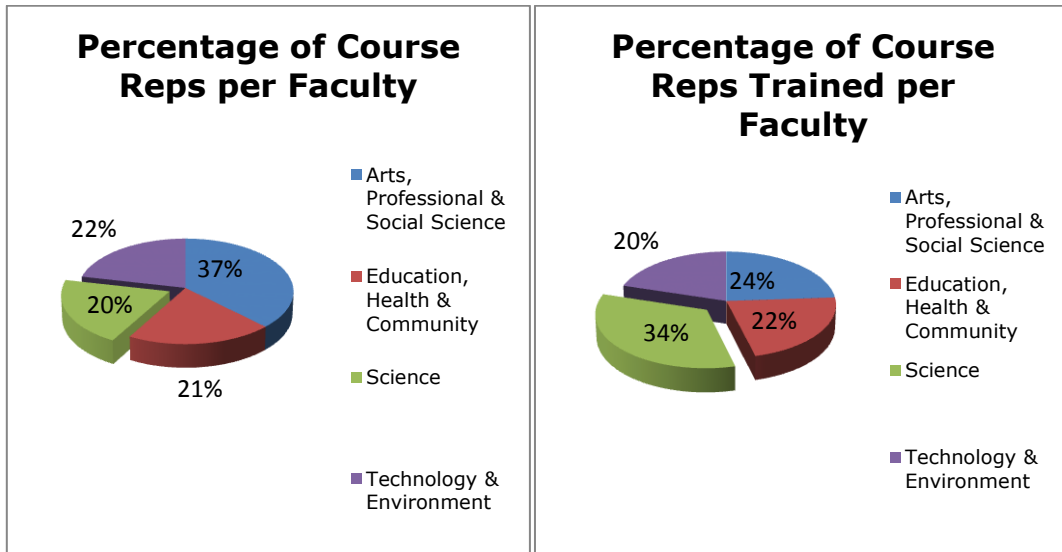
Course Reps

This year LiverpoolSU has 790 students volunteering in the role of Course Rep, of which 201 have received initial training.

Due to the success of last year's Course Rep Conference, LiverpoolSU provided two opportunities for new Course Reps to attend initial training. Below you will find a breakdown for the number of recruited Course Reps across the four faculties and the



percentage that have attended training in the last two years.



Academic Information Pack

At the beginning of the academic year all Programme Leaders received an 'Academic Information Pack'. This was for the use of all academic staff who are involved in the Course Rep System. This document highlighted the roles and responsibilities of all those involved in the process of recruiting, training and supporting Course Reps throughout the academic year.

Programme Leaders received a PowerPoint presentation and Course Rep information flyer alongside the Academic Information Pack. The aim was to provide a consistent message to all students regarding the Course Rep role and the support on offer to them. In addition Programme Leaders were encouraged to invite Student Voice Co-ordinators to give a short talk on the above information, when convenient. Every year we find some Course Reps who are not aware of what it is that they have volunteered to become and this is part of how we hope to counteract that. We hope Programme Leaders found them useful and they have seen an increase in more informed students volunteering for the position of Course Rep.

Course Rep Welcome Pack

To ensure our volunteers feel valued, supported and understand their role, LiverpoolSU have provided all Course Reps with a welcome pack (can be found here: <http://www.liverpoolsu.com/main-menu/student-voice/course-reps/course-rep-training-and-support/course-rep-resources>). This was sent via email as part of the initial contact with the Student Voice Team. The email included:

- A 'Thank You' letter from Liverpool Students' Union President, Curtis Reid
- An updated Course Rep Handbook
- The Course Rep Removal Policy (new this year- see below)
- LiverpoolSU Volunteer Guide
- Course Rep Information & Interests Form
- Data Protection Form



All Course Reps were encouraged to read though the provided information and asked to complete and return the Interests Form and Data Protection Form. This allows us to provide our volunteers with additional information about LiverpoolSU in line with their interests. The Data Protection Form gave Course Reps the opportunity to opt into additional support throughout the year via phone contact.

Course Rep Pilot System

LiverpoolSU, in conjunction with LJMU, hope to launch a new Course Rep System for the next academic year, September 2014, rolling out across the university. This system aims to provide consistency across all courses at LJMU, whilst providing flexibility for individual course needs. Ensuring there is a consistent model across campus will allow LiverpoolSU to provide exact and relevant training to all our Course Reps, ultimately eliminating unnecessary confusion for our volunteers.

Currently LiverpoolSU are trialling a number of pilots across all faculties with selected courses. LiverpoolSU has chosen a range of different courses with their own individual differences, based on mode of study, size of cohort, degree awarded and the inclusion of placements. The courses who agreed to be involved in the trial are:

- Computer Aided Design (TAE)
- Computer Science (TAE)
- Criminology (APS)
- Natural Sciences (SCS)
- Paramedic Practice (EHC)
- Sport Development (EHC)
- Sport and Exercise Science (SCS)

Trello- our online communication system for Course Reps

To help support the new Course Rep System and promote communication between all Course Reps from the same course, LiverpoolSU have promoted the online software Trello. This idea came from the Faculty of Technology and Environment and is being shared as good practice. Each course has now had a Trello page created for all the relevant Course Reps to join.

The aim is to share information between all levels, whilst providing Course Reps with relevant information about their course from; NSS data, previous Faculty Student Voice Reports and student feedback. For further information about Trello, or for a demonstration of its capabilities, please contact e.moloney@ljmu.ac.uk.

Course Rep Conference

All new Course Reps were invited to attend the annual Course Rep Training Conferences. This information was sent out directly to Course Reps whose names had been confirmed via Programme Leaders/School Administrators and the dates were sent to Programme Leaders to forward on to their Course Reps. In total 124 new Course Reps attended this year, a 24% increase on last year.

From anecdotal evidence it seems that many Course Reps did not attend the Conference either due to other commitments or because they were not informed in time. This was due to LiverpoolSU not receiving confirmed Course Rep names from Programme Leaders within the requested time frame stated in the Academic Information Pack. Next year we will move the conferences further back in the academic year, as well as reiterating a



revised date to members of academic staff.

Drop in sessions

To help address the above issue LiverpoolSU held a number of 'drop in' sessions across campus. This allowed Course Reps who were unable to attend the Course Rep Conference to come along and find out more about the role and the support on offer to them. We met an additional 38 Course Reps through this process.

Advanced training workshops

The Course Rep Conference is aimed at Course Reps who are new to the role. To ensure returning Course Reps had the opportunity to develop within their role we set up additional workshops. These covered the following four topics;

- Time Management
- Creating Stronger Arguments
- Communication and Negotiation
- Teaching Quality

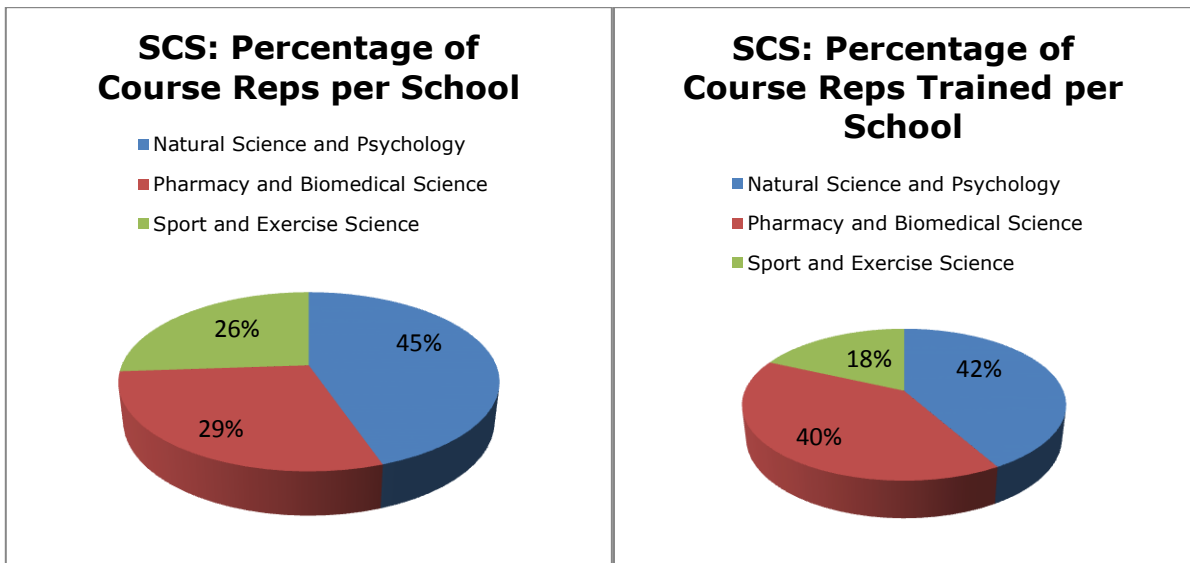
As there was only a small uptake to these workshops due to the assessment period, LiverpoolSU will be offering them again in the second semester and we are looking to hold them earlier in the next academic year.

Course Rep Ring Round

This year the Student Voice Team will be contacting Course Reps once a semester to find out how they are getting on in the role and if they require any additional support. Our aim is to ensure Course Reps that the Student Voice Team is there for them all year round and not just for providing initial training at the beginning of the academic year.

Course Reps in the Faculty of Science

The Faculty of Science currently has 161 Course Reps of which 55 of these students have received initial training from LiverpoolSU. The two graphs below illustrate the percentage of Course Reps across the three schools and the percentage of Course Reps that are trained within each school.



Induction and Retention Research

Introduction

For the first time LiverpoolSU has given the deans of each faculty the ability to direct LiverpoolSU's research into the current student experience at LJMU. We want to ensure that all of our research is useful and meaningful for the university.

Each question was asked across all faculties in the university, principally to give each Dean comparative data.

We first asked the Dean of Arts, Professional and Social Studies, Roger Webster, to direct our research in our "Question of the Month" for October 2013. Roger requested that we asked LJMU students three questions about their experience of induction:

1. What was positive about your recent induction experience?
2. What was negative about your recent induction experience?
3. How would you improve your recent induction experience?
4. Do you feel that you are part of your course?

All three questions gave us qualitative responses, with the third question giving us quantitative responses from students as well. The members of staff conducting the survey were briefed to say that inductions could happen in levels 5 and 6 as well as in level 4. They also took the following demographic information:

- Faculty
- Course
- Level
- Young/ Mature
- Home/ International
- Mode of study (full time/ part time)

Results

Overall, LiverpoolSU received 568 valid student responses, the vast majority of which (n=561) were spoken to face-to-face. The breakdown across faculties and levels are as follows:

Overall responses to Questions One, Two and Three

There were a variety of comments on the positives, negatives and areas for improvement for the LJMU induction process. The comments were also reflective of the very personal nature of being inducted into the university experience- there are many attributes, skills and pieces of information that need to be taken on board and developed in the first few weeks to ensure that students are prepared to begin their studies. Confidence levels in all these various different attributes will vary significantly from person to person, and it is difficult to create an induction process that will achieve vastly improved confidence levels across all students in all these areas of university life. Having said that, there are some significant changes that all four LJMU faculties could make to improve students' satisfaction with their induction.

Please find these conclusions broken down into level and faculty below.



Level Four Students in the Faculty of Science

- Faculty of Science students tended to concentrate on social issues and clarity of assignments or expectations. This can be best summed up by this quote from a Level 4 Animal Behaviour Student: *"not a lot could've gone better except for maybe a little more social time and information on exams"*.
- Many students commented that they wanted some more time to socialise as part of their induction or want a society on the course: *"There is no society attached to course so we have no opportunity to mix with others doing the same course in different year groups"* (Level 4 Natural Sciences)
- Students said that assignments and expectations of students could have been clearer
- Comparatively few students spoke about "information overload" or organisation/management issues. These were issues in the other LJMU faculties but did not present to the same extent in the Faculty of Science.
- Students said that a particular positive was how well they got to know their lecturers: *"got to know exactly who everyone is with your lecturers and got to know a bit about them which made you feel really comfortable"* (Level 4 Pharmacy)

Level Five and Six Students in the Faculty of Science

- Whilst some students felt that there was no specific information for Level 5 or 6 inductions and that they were not worthwhile attending, others spoke highly of them: *"The induction was very informative and included help on the practical side as well as the theory and tutorial work that is involved"* (Level 5 Biomedical Science student)
- As with Level 4 students, some responses regarded needing more student socials and a feeling of social exclusion.
- Other student comments considered a range of issues however it was difficult to ascertain commonality across the faculty.

Mature Students

We spoke to 36 mature students during our research. This is not a representative sample of mature students, nevertheless we have analysed responses from this group below. The majority of these students (n=26) came from the Faculty of Education, Health and Community (EHC).

- If they are a part of a small group they feel part of the course. This is mainly because their lecturers and tutors prioritise communication with students through email and blackboard.
- However if they are in a larger group they do not feel part of their course or university life. There is a significant correlation here.

International Students

We spoke to 15 international students in our research from across all four faculties in the university. This is not a representative sample. However six of these students said that they did not feel as if they were a part of LJMU. The main negative comment was that there was not enough pre-arrival information, and where they did see that information it

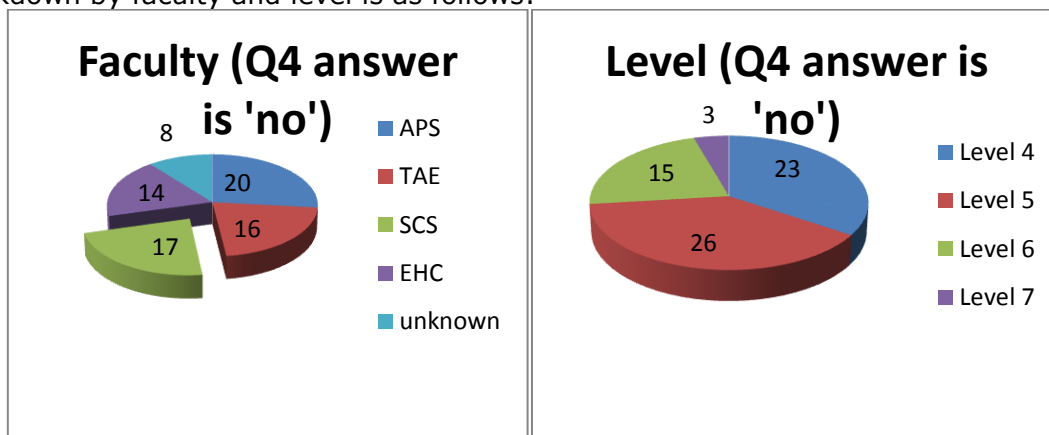


did not feel very personalised. Positive comments discussed the friendliness and approachability of LJMU staff.

Overall responses to Question Four- "Do you feel part of your course?"

The "What works? Student Retention and Success" report¹ identified students feeling of being part of their course to be the number one corollary for retention in Higher Education. This is why we asked this question- to understand what proportion of students were likely to remain on their course, and how their induction could have been improved to improve affinity with the course.

17% of students did not feel that they belonged to their LJMU course. Their demographic breakdown by faculty and level is as follows:



The distribution across the faculties is quite even, with the Byrom Street faculties seeing a proportionately larger number of students responding that they do not feel part of their course.

A summary of our findings on this is available below:

- Small group sizes were often mentioned as a positive when it came to feeling like students belonged to their course. It is therefore very important to ensure a quality induction on larger courses. However it is perhaps even more important in the courses that have exceeded their recruitment targets in 2013 to prioritise induction for the next few years.
- Information and contact from central LJMU was really important to creating a sense of belonging. Some students would have enjoyed a meeting from a senior member of staff in the university to welcome them to LJMU: "I feel more a part of

¹ Thomas, Liz (2012) 'Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: a summary of findings and recommendations from the What Works? Student Retention & Success programme', Paul Hamlyn Foundation, London.



- the ADA [Art and Design Academy] than LJMU because there is no SU outlets or big representatives from the Uni"* (Level 5 Popular Music student)
- Knowing who their Course Rep was, or being a Course Rep themselves made them feel part of their course: *"Being a Course Rep helps me feel that my course and university are connected and the university is taking note of how and what we are learning"* (Level 5 Business Management student)
 - Societies and sports teams were essential for many students to feel part of their course or university life in general: *"The course society is very well known and allows us to speak to a lot of new people"* (Level 6 Civil Engineering student), *"I joined the Zumba society and love the way I can get fit and have a laugh at the same time!"* (Level 4 Natural Sciences student).
 - Technology such as Facebook made some students feel more a part of the course
 - Welcome Week was very important to many students, as when the course induction didn't make them feel part of the university, the Welcome Week events (particularly the Freshers' Fair) did: *"The Freshers' Fair and events are always welcoming to not just first years, so it makes us still feel a part of LJMU"* (Level 6 Criminology and Sociology student).
 - Two students that don't drink alcohol mentioned that they felt like they could not engage in many of the activities during welcome week: *"I feel a part of the course due to Facebook groups, but not a part of LJMU as I don't drink; a lot of socials focus on alcohol and nothing much is advertised in terms of alcohol free socials"* (Level 5 English and Media Studies student). LiverpoolSU will consider this in our preparations for our induction week in 2014.
 - Some students mentioned space as an issue when getting to know one another, even in class: *"Yes, I feel part of the course, but there isn't enough room in the labs for everyone to get a space so they sometimes feel less involved."* (Level 4 Computer Forensics student).
 - Living with other LJMU students (in Halls of residence or private rented accommodation) made students feel more a part of LJMU. However if relationships broke down this made any feelings of isolation worse.

From this analysis we can see that the majority of students surveyed who didn't feel as if they were a part of their course were in Level 5. This analysis corresponds with the "Sophomore Slump" research that is currently being conducted by LJMU in conjunction with the HEA. However it is interesting to see that a significant amount of students still feel as if they are not part of their course even in the final year of university. These students still exhibit the same complaints about why they do not feel a part of the course as the other students above, so it seems as if issues that present themselves in first and second year can and do linger for final year students.

Recommendations

LiverpoolSU recommends that:

- specific induction information should go out to
 - o Joint honours students
 - o International students
 - o Students on courses with high Staff:Student Ratios (SSRs) or students on courses that have significantly over recruited or are projected to increase in size of cohort/ staff team.
 - o Students who live at home/ not in student or private rented accommodation



- further research is conducted, looking into the sense of belonging for international students, mature students and part time students. We would welcome working with the university on this.
- the university works with LiverpoolSU to ensure that every course at LJMU has an academic society set up from September 2014 onwards. This will require significant organisation.

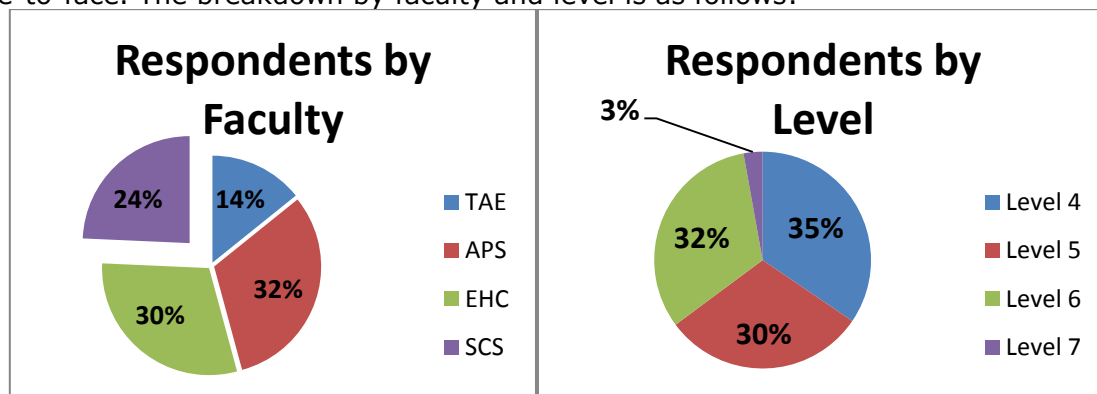
Blackboard Research

We asked the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Health and Community, Kate Johnston, to direct our "Question of the Month" for November 2013. Kate requested that we asked LJMU students three questions about the usage of blackboard:

1. How does Blackboard support your learning?
2. What encourages you to use blackboard?
3. How could the learning experience via blackboard be improved?

Results

LiverpoolSU spoke to precisely 600 students and the vast majority were interviewed face-to-face. The breakdown by faculty and level is as follows:



How does Blackboard Support your learning?

Across the faculties there were similar comments about how blackboard supports students' learning. It was apparent that many students relied on blackboard for course content to look at before lectures and during revision periods. They also relied on it as a key tool to support their independent learning.

Content information

Students have commented that blackboard is a very useful tool. They feel that the tool has many advantages, for example it compiles all the module content in one place. The notes are easily accessible and so they are able to read lecture notes before the lecture.

Students also mentioned that lecturers would upload extra reading material and web links which would have more information that was not covered in the lecture. Some lecturers would upload word documents where others would upload excel spreadsheets. This was seen as a positive by students.



Along with the lecture notes, students also mentioned that it was convenient to be able to see the module hand book on blackboard at any time.

- *"Lots of additional links to articles, websites, papers etc. from tutors would be too much to take down all this information in a lecture."* (Level 6 Journalism student)
- *"Notes and slides are all placed on blackboard prior to lectures. Blackboard allows us communication between lecturers, and as we get notifications of work etc. it's a simple way to find out what work has been assigned"* (Level 4 Mechanical Engineering student)
- *"Helps with my overall organisation and keeping my notes in one place."* (Level 6 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *"Get to see the over view of the course and learn what content we will be looking at each week."* (Level 4 Coaching Development student)

Revision/Assignment

Blackboard has also been seen as a key revision tool by many students; they feel that the information uploaded is useful and can prepare them well for the assignments and exams. It was also mentioned that lecturers would provide extra revision materials and upload online tests which students could complete:

- *"Exam reading is easy to access on Blackboard"* (Level 4 English student)
- *"There are lecture slides and exam preparation such as past papers which really help to practice."* (Level 5 Building Surveying student)
- *"It's good for if I forget what we're doing or where we're up to as we can reflect back on it, so it's good for revision. It's good for us to keep up with where we're meant to be"* (Level 4 Animal Behaviour student)
- *"Slides are a quick way of revising a past module and practising for exams"* (Level 6 Education Studies with Physical Education student)

Features (Community/Timetable/Announcement)

Students also spoke about the community page and how the use of that feature has increased awareness of issues on their course and of opportunities on their course.

Overall students felt that blackboard is a very useful and easy to use tool which includes a variety of features which enhance their learning and is used by a majority of students. It is clear that students have seen this as a benefit.

- *"Important announcements are posted on there to alert you and info on exams and course work is always on there"* (Level 5 Psychology and Criminology student)
- *"The notifications make it easy and helpful"* (Level 6 Sociology student)
- *"Community pages means that all years can speak"* (Level 5 Electrical Engineering student)
- *"The assignment dates, discussion boards and handbooks are all really helpful."* (Level 5 Applied Psychology student)
- *"Announcements and placement opportunities were put on there, keeps us in the loop when were away."* (Level 6 Education Studies and Physical Education student)
- *"There is a community section for the course and for opportunities"* (Level 6 Home Economics student)



full time work. It is appreciated that completing assessments is stressful in itself which is why LiverpoolSU supports the notion that assessment clustering should be avoided where possible.

- *'Being given three coursework pieces for the same deadline was really hard'* (Level 5 Electrical Engineering student)
- *'Assessment bunching- reviews of projects at the same time as deadline'* (Level 5 Architecture student)
- *'A lot of work is due before Christmas and there isn't enough time to fully research. Seminars relating to coursework and more spaced out assessments; give us more time to research would be a lot better; it's too much pressure otherwise'* (Level 5 Zoology student)
- *'Assessments are all due in around the same time so we have to be writing out three assignments at once, which is really difficult as it can get confusing flicking from one topic to the other. Assessments should be spread at least two weeks apart'* (Level 4 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *'A lot of coursework and exams are in for the same week, which a lot of us on the course struggle with as we have to work full time too. It's difficult to arrange childcare also when I have so many deadlines and exams to revise for. It's a lot of pressure'* (Level 5 Adult Nursing student)

In previous reports LiverpoolSU has suggested that the university utilises "assessment mapping" (or a "coursework schedule") to allow staff and students to acknowledge times of clustered deadlines. By consolidating all students' deadlines onto one clear document, clashes can be identified and limited where possible. Assessment mapping also aids students where bunching cannot be helped as by seeing the approaching deadlines in this format they can properly prepare for each deadline.

The feedback received by LiverpoolSU has also identified a new area of concern for students which relates to the clarity of information they are provided with regarding assessments. It has been noted that some students from across the faculties do not feel that they have been well informed about upcoming assessments and deadline dates. This can have negative implications such as feeling ill-prepared or adding additional unanticipated pressure. It must also be highlighted that there has been examples of good practice where students have received all the necessary information at the beginning of the academic year. By providing students with this information it would allow students to plan their time and commitments around deadlines and gives them the opportunity to understand what is required of them for each assessment.

- *'Assessments aren't given at the beginning of terms - do not know what assessments to expect or when. Not clear whether there are exams or when'* (Level 7 Legal Practice Course student)
- *'More information on exams and what [assessments] we have to do each year'* (Level 4 MPharm student)
- *'Lecturers could warn more about upcoming work'* (Level 4 Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice student)
- *'It would be good if all of our assessments and deadlines were made clear at the beginning and were set out clearly for us'* (Level 4 Adult Nursing student)
- *'I like that information about exams and assessment dates are given to us at the beginning of each module, it really lets us know where we stand and what the timeline is like'* (Level 4 Sport and Exercise Science student)



In addition, when lecturers go over the requirements of an assessment it is noted that the information can be rushed through and there isn't enough dedicated time for students to clarify their understanding. This can leave students feeling confused about the assessment and on occasion shakes students' confidence.

- *'There isn't enough support provided, especially for assessments'* (Level 6 Mental Health Nursing student)
- *'The assessments are not properly explained, and are hard to understand'* (Level 5 Media, Culture and Communication student)
- *'Assessments can be really confusing at times; we don't get much guidance so I struggle with some concepts'* (Level 5 Civil Engineering student)
- *'It is too fast paced so there is not enough support or time on assignments'* (Level 5 Accounting and Finance student)
- *'Lectures don't go through the coursework with us, which shakes our confidence'* (Level 5 Zoology student)
- *'There should be a designated lecturer to ask questions about coursework to - more use should be made of the discussion board of blackboard for this'* (Level 6 Applied Psychology student)
- *'Workshops are organised around assessments which offers clarity around them and has definitely enhanced my grades'* (Level 6 Events Management student)
- *'There is a lot of time dedicated to explaining what is expected of us and the assessments that we need to do and when it is due in'* (Level 5 Biology student)

LiverpoolSU have identified examples of faculty wide good practice to ensure students understand what is required of them when assessments are due. This includes; having sessions that are dedicated to the assessments and the expectations of students and organising workshops around assessments so students have the opportunity to clarify their understanding.

If the recommendation to utilise assessment mapping is adopted this would not only allow assessment clustering to be identified but it would also help highlight where dedicated time in relevant lectures or workshops needs to be set aside for assessment information, giving lecturers time to prepare for these as well as providing students information on when they can expect to address questions about the assessment. It would also provide a list of all the deadlines for the course. This could be disseminated out to students at the beginning of the academic year, to provide them with an overview of all deadline dates. Giving students this information at the beginning of the year would allow them to plan their time effectively and feel more prepared with upcoming assessments.

Feedback

Carrying out research across the university it was noted that only a handful of students raised the concern that feedback was not being returned to them within the 15 day timeframe. This is a significant improvement on comments from students last year. However due to the fact this issue is still being raised by students across all faculties we have continued to raise it below:

- *'Feedback is never within 15 days as stated which is frustrating'* (Level 5 Adult Nursing student)



- *'Feedback has taken two months; this is not acceptable'* (Level 6 Computer Aided Design student)
- *'Feedback for assessments is never within the 15 day timeslot which is frustrating'* (Level 6 Applied Psychology student)
- *'Only some lecturers give... feedback'* (Level 5 Business Studies student)

Continuing with the issue of feedback, students' comments also focused on the quality of the feedback they are receiving. It is not only important for students to receive feedback within the 15 day turnaround, but that the content of the feedback provides useful information to help them improve for future assessments. Identifying areas where students have completed work successfully will also provide additional confidence in their abilities.

- *'Feedback... with sufficient detail would help with assessments and course morale'* (Level 5 Adult Nursing student)
- *'Feedback is too brief'* (Level 4 Real Estate management student)
- *'The lecturers need to provide more feedback for us to work on and improve'* (Level 6 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *'Feedback on assessments doesn't help improve; too vague'* (Level 4 Health and Social Care student)

LiverpoolSU has put together a 'Top Ten Priorities' paper based on the comments we have received from students over the past years. It highlights the areas we wish to work on in partnership with the university to address these reoccurring issues. The quality of feedback is one of them. LiverpoolSU is currently working with university staff on this issue and we would therefore encourage anyone who is interested in this project to get in contact with us using the contact details at the end of this report.

Library Services and other LJMU Facilities

LiverpoolSU appreciates that the facilities across the university and those provided by the various libraries are not directly linked to the academic teaching staff; however they do have a significant impact on students' learning experience. LiverpoolSU have reviewed all the comments received from students across the university and we feel it would be beneficial to present these together. This will allow staff to further appreciate students' concerns. LiverpoolSU will also raise any issues regarding Estates Management and Library Services with these departments separate to this report.

Facilities

A common complaint from students has been the temperature of lecture rooms across the campus. LiverpoolSU appreciates that the majority of the time this is not within the lecturer's control. However it must be noted here, as it has in previous Faculty Student Voice Reports that this issue can have an adverse effect on students learning and their experience at LJMU.

- *'Room temperature can be an issue, always either too hot or cold'* (Level 5 Journalism student)
- *'Some of the classrooms are cold or really hot. Specifically the room S201 it's pretty much a shed with a radiator in. Improve the facilities'* (Level 4 Events Management student)
- *'The Henry Cotton building is awful, the rooms are... too hot, too stuffy'* (Level 7 Social Work student)



- *'Hot and coldness of the labs, it really can just put you off and you want to just go home'* (Level 4 Computer Forensics student)
- *'The windows should open further so we can get some fresh air into the classrooms at the top of the tower block'* (Level 3 Natural Science student)
- *'Room 206 in John Fosters is always freezing'* (Level 5 English and Creative Writing student)

The feedback gathered by LiverpoolSU has illustrated that students feel there are not enough learning resources available to them across campus; mainly in the form of computers and labs. Yet where the university does offer course specific resources and equipment LJMU students believe their accessibility is limited. Once again it is appreciated that this is not necessarily the responsibility of teaching staff, however when possible they should ensure resources/IT rooms are not booked if they are not in use.

- *'We need more computers so that we can focus on the teaching'* (Level 4 Computer Forensics student)
- *'There is a lack of computers in the Redmond's Building'* (Level 6 Business Studies student)
- *'Redmonds Building should be open at the weekends; we need to gain access to equipment'* (Level 6 Journalism student)
- *'IT rooms usage does not match the bookings - often IT rooms are booked but unused'* (Level 6 Nautical Science student)
- *'The osteology labs should be open longer and for revision'* (Level 5 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *'There isn't enough labs in the buildings that we can get hands on experience in'* (Level 4 MPharm student)
- *'There isn't enough resources for cooking'* (Level 4 Home Economics student)
- *'More access to studios because they are not accessible like majority of architecture schools around the country'* (Level 6 Architecture student)

Some students note that the quality of some facilities across campus is poor. The feedback suggests that teaching rooms are either not fit for purpose or they do not cater for the number of students using them. When possible and when timetabling permits lecture rooms should cater for the student needs and the class size.

- *'The Art room just isn't big enough and there are not enough seats'* (Level 5 Events Management student)
- *'The room for lectures isn't appropriate as you can't hear at the back'* (Level 4 Drama student)
- *'The lighting and air con in room 137 is terrible'* (Level 5 Biochemistry student)
- *'The lecturer is hard to understand because the room seems too big'* (Level 4 Criminology and Sociology student)
- *'The benches for practical are too small and there are too many people in the practical's'* (Level 5 Biomedical Science student)
- *'The Henry Cotton building is awful; it is too small and we feel like we are all sat on top of each other'* (Level 5 Biomedical Science student)
- *'The rooms aren't big enough for the classes'* (Level 5 Primary Education with QTS student)



- "Lectures should be more varied. Very extensive power point presentations." (Level 4 Journalism student)
- "Disinteresting lectures, reading off a PowerPoint." (Level 6 Sociology student)
- "Lectures are really boring and they read off the PowerPoint slides" (Level 6 Architectural Technology student)
- "Some modules lack a good interactive session and lecturers are just reading from the slides, which is inconvenient to those of us who commute because we could have stayed at home rather than travel all the way into town; it's unnecessary and not good teaching" (Level 6 Applied Psychology student)
- "Teaching varies across modules, some lectures just read from the slides which don't motivate us to learn, we're just really bored. More practical sessions would enhance learning and teaching. A consistency to teaching would be beneficial to us" (Level 4 Sport and Exercise Science student)
- "Teaching is generally reading from the slides which is demotivating as we have a very busy schedule so to come into town and arrange childcare for a lecture which you could have read at home is really infuriating" (Level 5 Adult Nursing student)
- "Lecturers don't teach they just read off the board, I don't feel like attending when this happens because I could save money and stay at home. It's pointless" (Level 4 Outdoor Education student)
- "Reading off the PowerPoint just isn't good enough" (Level 4 Primary Education with QTS student)

LJMU and LiverpoolSU would like to improve the quality of teaching across LJMU as this has the biggest impact on student experience.

It is clear that keeping students interested and engaged during lectures contributes to retention. LiverpoolSU would suggest working alongside Course Reps and using Boards of Study to identify how to improve learning and teaching on individual courses.

Staff: Student Ratios and Student Numbers

An area of concern for students regarded the number of other students in lectures and seminars. It is apparent that this is affecting the learning of students and also making them feel as though all their needs are not being addressed.

- "We have a few lectures with Criminology and they are too crowded, hard to hear and concentrate." (Level 4 Sociology student)
- "I would like more support from my tutor, some tutorials have 40 people in which is too many to stay focused" (Level 4 Fashion student)
- "Course is way too big; lecturers don't know my name and it feels quite impersonal" (Level 4 Civil Engineering student)
- "The class size could be made a lot smaller" (Level 4 Mental Health Nursing student)
- "As there are too many people in the lectures, I don't feel the course is as personal as it should be, and all my learning needs aren't addressed" (Level 4, Educational Studies and Early Years)



LiverpoolSU would recommend that the size of each class/group is considered, ensuring that there are not too many students for the available facilities. As can be seen above, students feel that this can affect concentration levels and the quality of teaching they receive.

This issue has been raised far more often this year compared to other years, presumably because LJMU has significantly over-recruited students in many areas, whilst not yet having the resources or infrastructure to deal with these student numbers.

Whilst it is excellent that LJMU continues to be financially stable, the university needs to fully consider the impact that increases in student numbers can have on physical resources, timetabling, and therefore the entire student experience. These negative impacts are only exacerbated by changing student targets later in the academic year and by increasing student number targets further for future years.

LJMU should invest significant sums of money into ensuring that physical resources, such as lecture theatres, computers and core texts give a comparable student experience comparable to previous years', and that negative impacts to staff student ratios are compensated for as soon as possible, and should be forecasted in advance of the rise in student numbers. Additionally, significant investment should be made into the timetabling system used at LJMU to ensure that these resources are used effectively.

At the same time we have heard from some students on courses that have not seen a significant increase in student numbers this year, including some of those students quoted above. It is therefore important to investigate these areas more fully to ascertain why these students complain about the impersonal nature of their course. This becomes even more of a priority as if students are complaining about this issue at present further rises in student numbers will only exacerbate the situation further.

Communication between Lecturers

Across the University there have been issues where students feel that lecturers are not communicating amongst themselves and this is affecting the quality of teaching for students. *"The teachers don't seem to know definite answers to questions; each module leader suggests something different."* (Level 5, Fashion)

- *"Lack of consistency between tutors"* (Level 4, Architecture)
- *"The lack of communication between the two schools, e.g. There is no cooperation between dissertation supervisors."* (Level 6, Forensic psychology and CJ)
- *"There is sometimes a lack of communication between the lecturers so we get repeat lectures"*(Level 6, Sport and Exercise Science)
- *"There is a lack of communication and organisation between the lecturers sometimes"* (Level 5, Midwifery)

Students feel that tutors are not communicating effectively and this is having a knock on effect on students' studies. LiverpoolSU would recommend 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.



Breaks

Across the University students have commented on the structure of their timetable, in particular the amount of time given for breaks during lectures and seminars. Feedback shows that breaks vary across the university, with some students having lengthy breaks for several hours compared to others who do not having any breaks between lengthy lectures.

In both scenarios students feel demotivated, when there are lengthy breaks students feel demotivated to return for the following seminar/lecture. If students do not receive breaks and have lengthy lectures/seminars they feel that they cannot concentrate.

- *"Tuesdays from 9-1 there are no breaks at all not even to get a quick snack so students get hungry by the end and find it hard to concentrate"* (Level 4 Business Studies student)
- *"Sometimes there is a large gap between lectures which can be demotivating for students to attend."* (Level 5 Building Surveying student)
- *"There needs to be more breaks so that we can relax and refresh our mind for the next lecture"* (Level 4 MPharm student)
- *"Although I like we're only in 2 days a week, some of the lecture last over 4 hours with no scheduled break; we do get a break but it's not long enough for food or to do anything with and by this time we've all lost concentration anyway"* (Level 6 Events Management student)

Based on the feedback above students want a more balanced timetable where they receive breaks which are adequate. They would like to have enough time to be able to get food, however they do not want this to be a significant amount as it demotivates them and also makes it hard for them to concentrate.

Invariably a proportion of this will come down to individual students' learning preferences and personal commitments outside of university. However LiverpoolSU would recommend that students are given adequate breaks which would enable them to stay focused. Whereas the issue regarding large gaps between lectures is more problematic, and is likely to require improved investment in the university's timetabling software, this issue can be resolved simply through communication with teaching staff.

Lecture Length/ Timetabling

Some issues mentioned by students were about the structure of their timetable, in particular issues around the length of lectures and finishing times. Some lectures were long and without breaks where others were shorter than timetabled for. Students raised issues about finishing late and not being able to prepare for the next day.

- *"The seminars seem pointless as lectures are 2 hours anyway, it is too long."* (Level 4 Criminology and Sociology student)
- *"Long lectures with no breaks are bad."* (Level 4 Civil Engineering student)
- *"3 hour lectures are too long and often students lose concentration, where lectures are 2 or more hours, there needs to be more of a break"* (Level 5 Biology student)
- *"The timetable is too spread out so we spend most of our time traveling to and from the campus"* (Level 5 Dance Practice student)



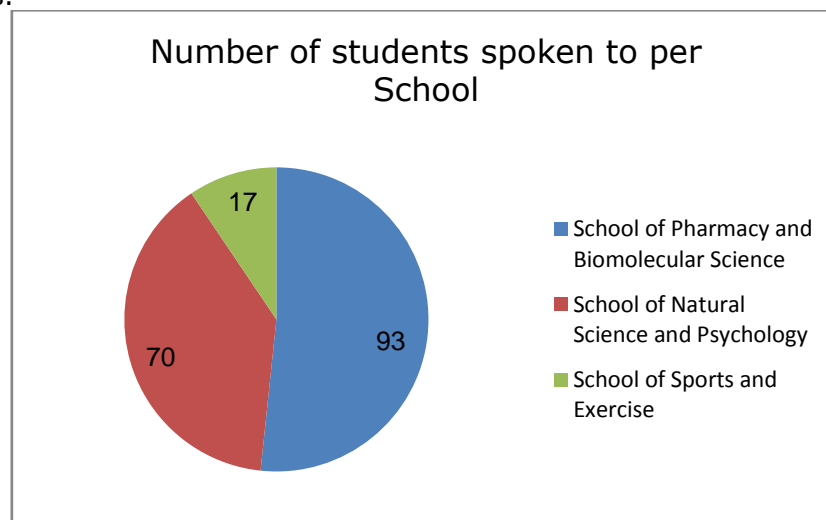
LiverpoolSU appreciate that timetabling issues can be challenging to overcome due to room booking availability.

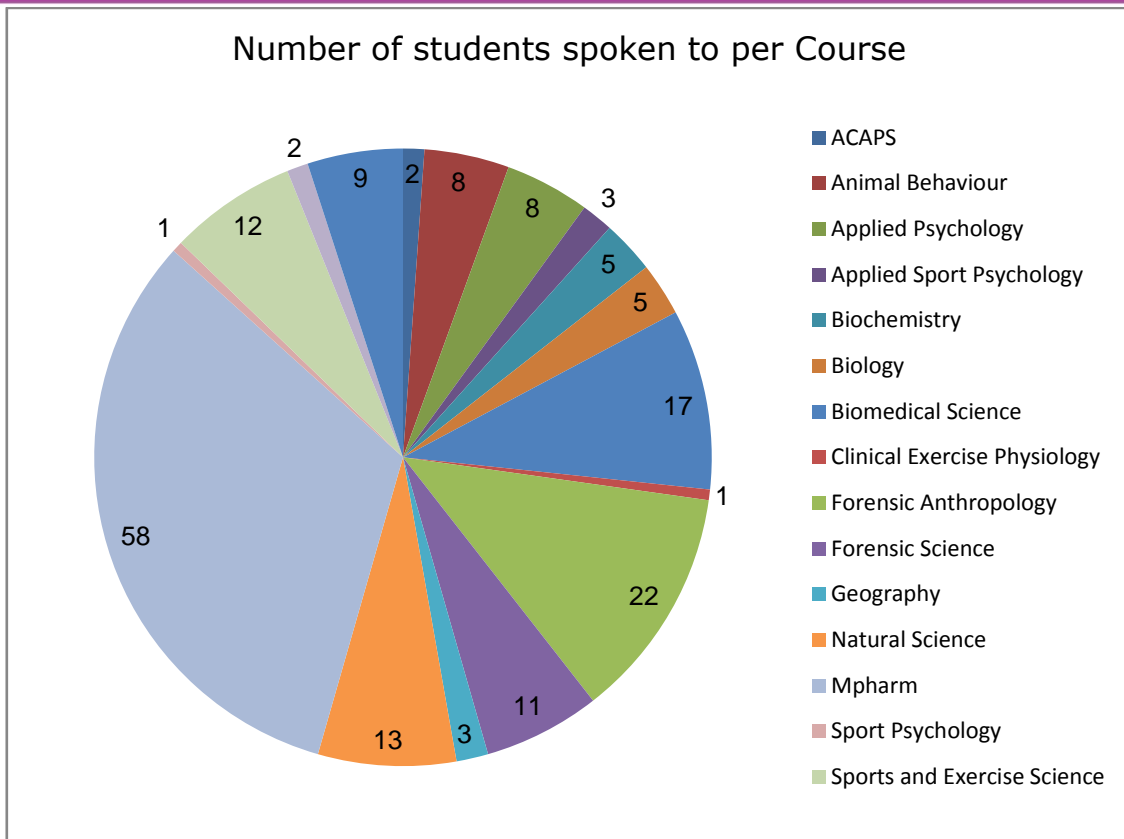
LiverpoolSU appreciates that timetable recommendations will come down to individual students' learning preferences and personal commitments. But many students have mentioned that lecture lengths vary and some do not run to the timetabled slot. Students would like for lectures to run for the scheduled time and for the whole session provided.

Faculty Specific Feedback

To complete the Faculty of Science Student Voice Report, LiverpoolSU staff spoke to a total of 180 students from the faculty. This sample included a minimum of two students from each the 15 undergraduate courses and two students from two of the postgraduate courses.

The charts illustrate the breakdown of the 180 students across courses and between the three schools.





Teaching Quality

LiverpoolSU staff has spoken to 180 students from the Faculty of Science, asking each of them about their university experience. Students were asked 'what is good about your course?' and 'how could it be improved?' The feedback received indicated that the teaching quality had both positive and negative aspects. There are areas, such as lecture number sizes and lecture interaction which were raised in the University Wide section of this report. We have also identified more faculty specific teaching quality areas which have been raised by Faculty of Science students.

The first area students highlighted related to students' knowledge and understanding of a topic. There have been occasions where students have felt assumptions have been made about their level of knowledge. This is mainly related to Level 4 students as lecturers are aiming to get all students to the same level. However as highlighted below, students understand the need to do this but imply that if the level of knowledge is necessary then it should be taught rather than assumed.

Linking with this, it has been noted that an aspect of teaching quality which is praised for is a lecturer's ability to ensure all students understand and follow what is being discussed. Students have seen this as an area of improvement when lecturers do not provide this level of clarity and support as is it not simply about just asking students if they understand, but offering different ways of explaining a subject to reach as many students as possible, ensuring their understanding.



- *'Lecturers need to make sure students understand the topics'* (Level 6 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *'The recap over work we already know isn't a bad thing as some things we may have forgot but if lecturers could... expand on the A level bits we've been taught it would make us feel a lot more confident in the course'* (Level 4 Applied Psychology student)
- *'Lecturers sometimes assume students already know some topics from A level and don't go over them. All topics need to be covered regardless of prior knowledge or not'* (Level 4 Sport & Exercise Science student)
- *'He is a brilliant lecturer because he... explains things properly until everybody understands'* (Level 5 MPharm student)

Due to the nature of the courses at the Faculty of Science, feedback from students has highlighted the importance of practical work being included as part of the course as a way of clarifying students' understanding of a topic. Students from across the schools have emphasised the importance of practical work as it enhances their learning, especially when they are run alongside module content. Practical work is an interesting way of addressing topics but it has been noted that due to time restrictions on these sessions they can sometimes be rushed which can be counterproductive to students understanding.

- *'Practical work is good because we are given a lot of info beforehand and they are very interesting'* (Level 6 Biochemistry student)
- *'I like that we have more practical work this year'* (Level 5 Biology student)
- *'Practical sessions are run alongside module content'* (Level 7 Biomedical Science student)
- *'More practical sessions would enhance learning and teaching'* (Level 4, Sport and Exercise Science student)
- *'There is a time limit on our practical sessions which makes us miss things and have to rush. There needs to be a lot more time made for practical sessions'* (Level 4 Biomedical Science student)

Improving the quality of learning and teaching across LJMU is a complicated issue, yet it is the issue that most affects the student experience. Whilst there are clear examples of good practise in the Faculty of Science there are also areas for improvement. Whilst the Faculty should obviously continue to improve learning and teaching as outlined in the learning and teaching strategy, LiverpoolSU believes that only by working with students will examples of excellence and poor practice become salient. The Faculty of Science should continue to use Course Reps and Boards of Study to identify how to improve learning and teaching.

Learning Resources: Lecture Notes

In previous Faculty of Science Student Voice Reports the issue concerning the availability of lecture notes on Blackboard had been raised by numerous students across the schools. LiverpoolSU wishes to take this opportunity to note the distinct lack of feedback we have received from students regarding this issue this year. We are aware this issue was raised at the end of the previous academic year at a Faculty level meeting where the view was supported that *'staff should be encouraged to put lecture notes on Blackboard in advance'* (SCS FASEP, 13/05/13) along with the circulation of the policy outlying the time scales for the availability of lecture notes. These actions appear to have had a positive impact to the accessibility of lecture notes for students, and



- *'Project supervisors need to answer emails more quickly/actually respond to them so that students can solve problems with their projects quicker - Level 4 MPharm student'* (Faculty Student Voice Report, June 2013)

The support offered by lecturers is essential to students' learning; it is the student's way of clarifying their own understanding and gaining reassurance that they are on the right track. When this isn't properly managed students can become unnecessarily stressed due to uncertainty as the support offered helps with students' studies.

LiverpoolSU is mindful that lecturers have their own work load to contend with, and that students' needs usually increase during assessment and examination periods. However it is important for student's expectations to be managed sufficiently regarding the support they can expect to receive.

LiverpoolSU has previously suggested that online resources like Blackboard community sites and discussion boards are utilised more effectively during these busy times so all students questions can be answered in one go and the information can be found in one place, reducing repeat emails. Such mechanisms can be very useful in reducing lecturers' admin time whilst also providing an excellent resource to students.

Personal Development

When research was carried out in the Faculty of Science LiverpoolSU identified that with regards to personal development students wished to be more knowledgeable about future careers and for this to be incorporated into lectures where possible. It has been noted that there is link between having this information and feeling that they are a part of their course and, as a result, they are less likely to drop out.

- *'Would like to receive more information on careers fairs'* (Level 4 Animal Behaviour student)
- *'Do not feel confident within abilities or confident applying for work and/or work experience. Need more careers advice and a more straightforward approach to job applications integrated on the course. Placements would help'* (Level 6 Forensic Anthropology student)
- *'More information on the variety of courses after first year'* (Level 3, Natural Sciences student)
- *'I think it would be better if we were taught more relevant information to our career'* (Level 5 MPharm student)
- *'Lack of careers advice makes me feel quite nervous about a certain career path. More careers advice integrated within lecture'* (Level 5 Zoology student)
- *'Since starting the course I do feel a lot more confident about my career options as a lot of career information is given'* (Level 4 Sport and Exercise Science student)

Due to the current economic climate it is safe to assume that this desire for career knowledge is not going to subside any time soon. In order to respond to this demand LiverpoolSU proposes that the Faculty of Science looks into ways they can introduce more opportunities in the programmes for students to gain relevant knowledge about prospective careers and demonstrate how their modules link to these careers. We will also pass these comments onto the World of Work Careers Centre for their information and response.



Organisation and Management

The research carried out by LiverpoolSU staff has provided feedback relating to the organisation and management within the Faculty of Science. There are areas, such as timetabling, lecture lengths and breaks which have been raised in the "University Wide Issues" section of this report. However an additional faculty specific organisation and management area has been raised by Faculty of Science students.

Students from across the three schools have highlighted areas which could be improved regarding the logistics of when topics are taught, when subjects are covered and when supporting workshops/practical work takes place. Students have said that the reasoning behind this is not always clear as to them it does not appear to be the most logical time for them to take place.

- *'The practical sessions have started too early in the year; need better organisation in modules'* (Level 6 Biochemistry student)
- *'There should be more of a continuation of lectures- not cut and chop topics in a lecture'* (Level 5 Biomedical Science student)
- *'There is sometimes a lack of communication between the lecturers so we get repeat lectures'* (Level 6 Sport and Exercise Science student)

In addition students have commented about the links between seminars/workshops and lectures. It is appreciated that workshops are a welcome resource for students, especially for clarifying their understanding and knowledge on a topic. However from the comments below it is evident that students wish there were either more of these or that they were held at a more suitable time during the academic year.

- *'Seminars and lectures are too spread out over the week. The seminars should follow directly on from lectures as the information is fresh in our minds'* (Level 5 Applied Psychology student)
- *'Sometimes there isn't much support for the lecture content. There could be some more workshops to support the lecture content'* (Level 4 Biomedical Science student)

It is important for staff to not only look at the overall running of a module but how all the modules on the course link together and relate to one another. This would ensure that topics are not unnecessarily repeated, as well as providing an overview to see when additional workshops/seminars are most effective.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this report was to amplify the voice of students from across the Faculty of Science. This has allowed LiverpoolSU to identify where there is consensus amongst students regarding good practice across the faculty as well as areas for improvement.

In order to improve the student experience in the faculty LiverpoolSU have highlighted a number of recommendations throughout this report. To summarise these are that the faculty:

- Ensures that programme teams use assessment mapping in order to avoid deadline clashes.



- Ensures time is set aside to go through assessment requirements, allowing students the opportunity to clarify their understanding.
- Continues to monitor and provide feedback within the 15 day turnaround period.
- Ensures that there is sufficient communication between teaching teams to improve the organisation of courses.
- Works with Course Reps and students to maintain high standards of teaching quality.
- Continues providing students with lecture notes in advance of lectures, as well as continuing to improve the quality of the lecture notes themselves.
- Continues providing high standards of academic support ensuring that students have adequate contact time with lecturers
- Ensures there are opportunities for students to gain relevant knowledge about prospective careers and demonstrate how their modules link to these.
- Ensures that there is sufficient communication between teaching teams to ensure all modules on the course link together and relate to one another.

The faculty should also work with the wider university to:

- ensure that the student: staff ratio is as low as possible, working wherever possible to achieve the university's stated SSR target and compensating for potential increases in SSRs as far as possible in advance. At the same time the faculty should also manage student expectations around contact time and the support lecturers can give.
- Advocate that the university invests in the university's timetabling software in order to resolve students' timetabling complaints.
- Continue supporting teaching staff in improving their teaching styles, and moving away from an over-reliance on such technologies as PowerPoint.
- Lengthen the frequency of enforced IT password changes. If it is unwilling to change its policy in this regard then the reasons for the changes should be made clear to students periodically throughout the year.
- Send tailored induction information out to new
 - Joint honours students
 - International students
 - students on courses with high Staff:Student Ratios (SSRs) or students on courses that have significantly over recruited or are projected to increase in size of cohort/ staff team.
 - Students who live at home
- Conduct further research on the sense of belonging for international students, mature students and part time students. LiverpoolSU would welcome working with the university on this.

We look forward to working with members of staff from across the faculty in order to address these issues as soon as possible. The faculty should also specifically work with LiverpoolSU on ensuring that every course at LJMU has an academic society set up from September 2014 onwards.

