



# **Student Priorities for Education**

## **Trends in Student Feedback**

**2021-22**



# Introduction

The annual Student Priorities for Education Report aims to provide a snapshot on student issues, including examples of best practice and points for improvement for staff across UCL that they can use in their own interactions with students. The report serves as an accompaniment to the work of Student Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs) at a departmental level by highlighting any areas that may require a bigger solution, with changes needing to be implemented across the whole of the institution. One of the most common questions academic representatives have is how the feedback they give makes a difference when change isn't possible at a departmental level, and this insight aims to ensure that no issue that is consistently raised by students is overlooked.

The report focuses on the different trends found in SSCC meetings which take place across UCL. This year's report is our biggest yet, covering 403 different sets of SSCC minutes since the 2020-21 academic year and over 6,500 lines of qualitatively coded data. For each set of SSCC minutes that we receive from departments and faculties, we categorise student comments which relate to a particular aspect of their UCL experience, and note whether they have expressed this negatively, neutrally, or positively.

As in previous editions, the topics discussed in this report are selected based on the areas that have been highlighted most frequently in our qualitative coding system, providing a rigorous statistical basis for the choice of topics and allowing us to compare this year's report with the topics discussed in previous years. We have focused on what areas students have indicated are their highest priorities, both in positive comments about what they would like to see continued, or in negative comments about what they would like to see improved.

As the third consecutive academic year of huge change in teaching and learning at UCL comes to an end, with teaching now taking place at a large scale both online and in-person, it is crucial that the latest student opinion is listened to and acted on. We hope that this report informs and shapes discussion around the academic experience at UCL, and that student feedback continues to play a pivotal role in decisions related to UCL education.



**Ayman Benmati**  
**Education Officer 2020-22**

## Overview

*“Feedback given in the meeting was generally very positive with students commenting on their enjoyment of the lessons, especially the face-to-face classes, great course structure and content, useful material, well-paced lessons, classes taught at the right level for the group, efficient progression, engaging tutors, and students enjoy the speaking practice.”*

*“Students have raised concerns regarding the timing of when module information is uploaded. Information for some modules are uploaded weeks in advance where other module information is uploaded a few days prior to the module commencing, which students find difficult to plan around in particular with the hybrid online and in person.”*

As in both previous editions of the report, students were most positive about excellent teaching delivery they received, expressing their appreciation for passionate lecturers who provided effective feedback and utilised a variety of engaging teaching styles. The area of Careers & Personal Development has now also been featured in two consecutive editions of this report, with students highlighting their appreciation not just for opportunities to boost their employability skills but also for the chance to network and make connections that may be useful in their careers.

Some positive areas highlighted in this report have not been featured in recent editions. The issue of Transition & Induction is new to 2022, with students appreciating an engaging welcome programme with events designed to get to know students, staff, and the area, as well as to provide essential information for new cohorts. Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs) also received praise in SSCC meetings this year, with their role benefitting both the students who interacted with them and the PGTAs themselves who were able to develop new skills and experience. Class/Seminar Sizes is also new to this year's report, and whilst comments in this area were more mixed there was a clear appreciation expressed when students were able to work in small group seminars, and when breakout groups were used effectively.

As in previous editions of the report, concerns surrounding assessment are prominently featured in the negative issues arising from SSCCs. Four of the seven negative issues in this year's report are related to this broad theme: Timing of Assessment, Assessment Quality/Style, Assessment Preparation and Assessment Criteria. Whilst the exact makeup of issues with assessment varies from year to year (for example, Timing of Assessment has featured in most recent reports, whereas Assessment Preparation is new to 2022) it is clear that this general theme is still a consistent area of student consternation.

The issue of Communication has also appeared regularly in recent editions of the report and features again in 2022, with students unsurprisingly dissatisfied when the information they receive is inconsistent or contradictory, or when responses to queries are delayed. On top of this, the issue of Class Timetabling has again been highlighted in SSCC minutes after featuring in the 2020 report, with students pointing to the challenges of juggling both face-to-face and online teaching as well as the spread of contact hours within their timetables. Perhaps surprisingly, the issue of Learning Resources appears as a negative in this year's report after being highlighted positively in the period immediately following Covid in the 2020 report, with students particularly highlighting problems they have had with the quality or availability of uploaded material.

## Progress Against the Recommendations from the Previous Report

In the 2021 Student Priorities for Education Report, ten different recommendations were made across two main areas: Assessment and Feedback, and Student Support and Skills. We are grateful for the updates UCL have provided and the work they have undertaken to act upon these recommendations. We hope that the feedback and suggestions from last year's report continue to drive change across the institution, particularly as many of these recommendations are still relevant to the feedback we have received this year, particularly in the area of assessment. The table below represents an update on the progress of these recommendations as of May 2022.

Recommendation	Update
<b>Assessment and Feedback</b>	
a. Coordinate assessment timing with common modules to minimise the clustering of assessment deadlines for students.	<p>The CHART tool is being developed as a product through the Education domain in ISD, and a business manager has been appointed. The development has been informed by consultation with users and students throughout the second term.</p> <p>UCL is currently identifying ways to ensure that all relevant assessment deadline dates are added onto Portico. This will facilitate an automated process for Extenuating Circumstances and reports will be able to be created from this data to give departments a greater visibility on assessment load by both student and programme.</p>
b. Continue to cascade the guidelines for ensuring programme level consistency for summative assessment load, accelerating efforts to improve this consistency and ensure that students know what to expect and feel their assessment load is fair and proportionate.	Student feedback on this area has been positive, with a demonstrable focus on aligning to the model for all new programmes.
c. Continue to investigate the integration of assessment criteria for modules into the Online Module Catalogue, including expectations around workload, to ensure that students have a clear and accessible route in determining the definitive criteria of which they will be assessed.	<p>The Programme Design Team was established in December 2021. The team runs a series of dynamic programme and module design workshops and has developed new tool kits.</p> <p>A new toolkit on writing programme and module levels outcomes is in draft format, undergoing consultation with Faculty, Academic Services, and Student Assessment Partners.</p>
d. Ensure that the service standards for feedback on assessments is reinstated, with students receiving feedback within one month of the assessment deadline.	This was temporarily suspended for 2019/20 and 2020/21 but has been reinstated for 2021/22.

e. When assessment takes place online, allow individual faculties and departments discretion with regards to decisions on late submissions in these assessments, in the same manner that currently happens for coursework.	<p>UCL have reported that there are standard regulations on late submissions to ensure that all students are treated fairly and eliminate opportunities for discrimination or bias in decision-making.</p> <p>Separate regulations for different assessment types (including take-home papers) were defined as part of the Assessment Operating Model for 2021/22.</p>
f. Review the effect that the changed assessment landscape has had over the last year, including the impact that the No Detriment Policy has had on eliminating the BAME awarding gap, the difficulty of exams and the clustering of online assessment, in order to inform a future digital learning strategy.	A report on the Effects of the 2019-20 No-Detriment Policy was written to summarise the impact. A further report for the impact of 2020 - 21 is currently in progress.
<b>Student Support and Skills</b>	
a. Ensure that the new Student Advisors roles in faculties and academic staff regularly communicate with students and assess the support they need to make up for lost opportunities and truly succeed.	Awaiting update.
b. Complete the current review of the extenuating circumstances procedure, ensuring that the process and guidelines are clear and supportive moving forward and that all cases from this academic year are resolved fairly and timely.	The extenuating circumstances strand of the Student Support Review is making good progress and aiming for approval at the June meeting of Education Committee.
c. Ensure that all departments are working with the UCL Academic Communication Centre to enhance students' discipline-specific writing and speaking skills, working to address any skills that students feel they are lacking as a result of the pandemic.	The Academic Communication Centre (ACC) meets regularly with the Students' Union to progress this area, and UCL have reported that it would be useful to consider the best mechanism for students to let the ACC know where specific support is required, for example feeding up through the academic rep system.
d. Continue to monitor students who may have missed out on previous experiences of assessment or other academic skills as a result of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years, providing further skills or formative assessment opportunities where required to help cover any shortfall.	The new assessment model for 2022-23 requires departments to consider support and mock exams where they wish to bring back face-to-face Controlled Condition Written Exams. Other missed opportunities were being monitored by Faculties and Departments.

# Positives

## Teaching Delivery

The area of Teaching Delivery is a mainstay of these reports, featuring as the most positively commented upon issue in both reports since 2020. Within SSCC minutes received this academic year, this topic alone received 826 comments, over 300 comments ahead of the next most commented upon area (Learning Resources, 516 comments). This area also received the highest proportion of positive comments at 46% (N=380/826), as well as the third lowest proportion of negative comments at 34% (N=277/826).

As can be expected, students appreciated staff member's hard work and dedication in improving their learning, responding particularly well to interactive elements of seminars and lectures. Teaching staff who were adept at using a variety of teaching methods, as well as different modes of delivery, were singled out for praise, and Q & A sessions and seminars were reported as being particularly enjoyable and useful in enabling students to tackle the subject matter at hand.

Lecturers who were able to explain complicated concepts in an accessible manner were a particular focus of some positive comments in this area, especially when interactive elements were introduced to seminars and lectures. This proved particularly effective when teaching staff provided comprehensive and constructive feedback on both formative and summative work, in addition to making themselves available to discuss said feedback. Finally, students regularly singled out for praise those staff members who made attempts to diversify the curriculum and ensured that their teaching was inclusive.

### Students told us:

- » "This was the most engaging module this year due to its interesting content delivery, fun activities and interactive tasks."
- » "Students report really enjoying their modules and find the lecturers straight to the point and passionate about the subjects."
- » "The core module content was varied, well-organised, and had interesting speakers."
- » "Students provided positive feedback for these modules, they are well-organised and fun, with very responsive staff and enjoyable content"
- » "Some students like the style of lectures in advance supported by Q & As, it is much easier to ask questions before the lectures."
- » "Students said that diversity and inclusion was a very beneficial element of the curriculum. It was good to encompass it throughout the year. The discussions in break out rooms and Practice Tutor groups helped students to understand how to apply inclusivity ideas in services, how inclusive the services are and what needs to be done to make them more inclusive."

**Points of good practice:**

- » Regardless of whether lectures are taking place in-person or online, provide students with everything they need to ensure that they understood the concepts being discussed within a taught module, and include regular opportunities for students to pose questions regarding any uncertainty they had with the topics discussed.
- » Build in interactive teaching methods regardless of whether delivery has moved online, such as live polls during lectures, weekly quizzes, and video content.
- » Ensure that curricula are inclusive and centred around a diverse range of perspectives and voices, such as through using the UCL Inclusive Curriculum Healthcheck.

## Transition & Induction

The topic of Transition & Induction has not featured in previous reports, but students responded positively to their experiences in minutes received this year. In the minutes received this academic year, minutes from 2021-22 were far more positive about this issue than those from 2020-21, with 51% of 2021-22 comments being positive (N=30/59) compared to just 33% of those from 2020-21 (N=16/48).

Many students reported appreciating the clear guidance they were provided during Welcome Week, with information regarding who to contact with various issues and queries receiving a high amount of praise. Students were also keen to meet teaching staff within the department during induction events and were grateful for varied event programmes during this period to help not only to get to know their fellow students and relevant staff members, but also to familiarise themselves with the campus and its surrounding area through activities such as walking tours.

### Students told us:

- » “The welcome hub was helpful, easily accessible, provided reassurance that the course is going ahead.”
- » “A new project was introduced called phased induction and aimed to offer all possible information students need to know about the faculty once they arrive. Really good feedback was offered about those sessions.”
- » “Lots of positive comments were received on the walking tour of the campus that had been arranged specifically by the department. Students responded very positively to meeting members of staff face to face.”
- » “Students felt that they knew who to contact when they had questions. It was understood why in-person social events couldn’t be held but they would be very desirable in future years.”

### Points of good practice:

- » As part of student induction, include information sessions providing guidance on services available both inside the department and across UCL, with clear signposting to such services as well as any relevant points of contact for student questions.
- » When planning an induction programme for new cohorts, try to put together a varied programme of events giving students the chance to meet each other, be introduced to staff, and become more familiar with the UCL campus and surrounding areas. Walking tours are particularly valued by students.

## Class & Seminar Sizes

Despite only receiving 29 total comments in this year's report, many students responded positively to the issue of Class & Seminar Sizes. Students reserved particular praise for small tutorial groups or class sizes, which allowed for more interaction and a deeper consideration of the topics covered. Where feedback was not as positive in this regard, it was often related to seminar groups being too large, creating an intimidating atmosphere and stifling free-flowing conversation.

Students also reported enjoying the use of small breakout groups both online and in-person to discuss the subject matter in a more detailed way before feeding into a larger seminar discussion. However, it is also important to bear in mind that negative comments regarding such breakout groups were made by students when it was reported that some students were not actively participating.

### **Students told us:**

- » "Smaller class sizes allowed for more interaction."
- » "Trainees have highlighted that small break-out groups in seminars have been successful. These have created a good balance between independent learning and group teaching."
- » "Students like the breakout rooms in the live online sessions, especially where the group is larger."
- » "The seminars seem very large and it's difficult to have a detailed discussion with large sessions in reference to face-to-face seminars for the module. Sometimes it is close to 30 students in a seminar."

### **Points of good practice:**

- » Ensure that seminar groups are small enough for all students to participate and to create a vibrant discussion where students can feel comfortable in contributing.
- » When using breakout groups in both online and in-person seminars, ensure that all students are encouraged to participate in discussions.

## Careers & Personal Development

The topic of Careers & Personal Development has been highlighted by students as one of the most positive issues within our coding system for the second year in a row, having also been included in our 2021 report. Whilst over half of the comments related to this area were neutral (N=56/106), less than 30% of the comments were negative (N=31/106), the lowest proportion across all categories.

The idea of networking was a consistent theme of comments made in this area, with students eager to have opportunities to make connections that would be beneficial to them in their career. Students also regularly expressed interest in skills sessions that helped improve their employability skills, such as CV writing or interview sessions. When students were aware of and attended the events available within UCL Careers, many reported finding such sessions valuable for both networking and skills development, and students often asked their own course or department if similar, tailored events could be held.

### Students told us:

- » “A UG rep reported that they had attended the recent UCL Careers events and found them very useful. Their impression was that other students in attendance were also very satisfied. UCL has organised online chats with alumni and students with similar career aspirations and it would be good if something similar could be arranged with alumni in our course.”
- » “Some attended the interviews session and found it helpful. It was found particularly helpful that multiple sessions were run.”
- » “Students had the chance to meet agents and specialists. Some made connections and secured employment. Very positive feedback was offered.”
- » “Students have really appreciated the industry speakers. Students were enthusiastic about keeping some online speakers so that overseas speakers can continue to be included.”

### Points of good practice:

- » Ensure that students are aware of the opportunity to attend events held by UCL Careers, such as networking events, external speakers, and skills development workshops.
- » As mentioned in last year’s report, students always appreciate being able to make use of any links with alumni that the course or department has, enabling students to form meaningful connections and seek their advice on the skills they need for their chosen careers, as well as graduate life.
- » When considering what career activities students might appreciate at a course or departmental level, provide events or sessions that cater to both skills’ development and to networking.

## Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs)

As with Class & Seminar Sizes, the issue of Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs) received a relatively small number of comments compared to other topics (50), however many students reported responding positively to this role. This includes undergraduate students who had received the benefit of help and support from PGTAs, and it was reported that on many occasions this role helped supplement the teaching offered by their lecturers, as well as answering any questions that students might have. On top of this, postgraduate research students appreciated the experience and skills that the role brought, helping to provide vital preparation for potential future careers in academia.

### Students told us:

- » “Over the course of the previous week staff had checked in with all student groups and observed that 10 groups had not started on their respective project work. Following intervention and further support from TAs most of those groups had since made progress.”
- » “Students appreciate the support from Teaching Assistants, who are approachable and helpful, whether that is in office hours or other times.”
- » “Ph.D. candidates that worked with students were good at demonstrating, simplifying, and explaining the experimental procedures.”
- » “It has been widely recognised that PGTA work is valuable for students in gaining teaching experience and helping Programme Leads with the delivery of taught modules/ programmes.”

### Points of good practice:

- » Where possible, hire and integrate PGTAs into teaching at other levels of study within your department or faculty, supplementing the teaching and support offered by academics and providing students with more contact time and additional points of contact.
- » Make sure that PGTAs within your faculty are well-trained and are subject to fair compensation and working conditions. On top of this, support PGTAs in making the most of this role in developing their experience, such as through regular discussions regarding skills learned and further development opportunities.

# Negatives

## Timing of Assessment

Timing of Assessment is a topic that has come up in previous issues of this report and was an issue that was prevalent in minutes received for this year, with almost 80% of comments related to this area being negative (N=179/226). The main concern expressed was regarding the bunching of assessments, with multiple assessment deadlines often falling within a short space of time. Students reported that this bunching not only affected their academic performance and hindered them from demonstrating their true potential, but also affected their mental health and added to their levels of stress.

When considering the timing of exams, many students reported that these fell too close to other assessment deadlines, such as project submissions, or in the case of Postgraduate Taught students clashed with important dates within their dissertation such as the proposal submission. There was also a particular concern around deadlines for Term 1 assessments, with many students reported these falling once Term 2 teaching for other modules had already begun.

### Students told us:

- » “There is an issue of students having multiple deadlines on the same day. Compounded by part-time work commitments and mental health issues this is challenging for students.”
- » “Students are experiencing difficulties due to having exam deadlines that are very close together and have been using extensions to alleviate the stress.”
- » “Students engage less as term goes on as assessment deadline pile up. Is there a way to better spread assessments for core modules?”
- » “It seems that module leaders are not working together to agree on more spaced-out deadlines, resulting in having many assignments to hand in at the same time.”
- » “The second and final assessment on the module was set and due to be submitted in Term 2, despite that teaching on the module had concluded in Term 1, had in turn impacted on students’ ability to make progress on their Term 2 modules, and on their Individual Project work.”

### Points for improvement:

- » Stagger different assessment deadlines so they do not fall too closely together for a large contingent of students within a particular module or programme. It is important that this is not just done across one module but across common modules that students in a programme or year of study are undertaking.
- » Ensure that all assessment deadlines for Term 1 modules are completed before Term 2 teaching has begun.

## Learning Resources

The area of Learning Resources is a topic that is newly featured amongst those most negatively discussed, with it last being featured in this report as a positive topic in 2020. Amongst this year's minutes, Learning Resources received the second most comments (516), with only 22% of them being positive (N=113/516). Many of the concerns raised were regarding lecture recordings, with students reporting issues with lectures not being made available on Lecturecast or the poor quality of videos, particularly with regards to sound quality or live captioning.

The issue of learning resources not being available when students required them was not unique to lecture recordings. Many students reported delays in uploading relevant content such as lecture slides or solutions to problem sets, or that learning material for their module was released too close to teaching beginning, either at the beginning or during said module. The fact that students would like resources to be provided in a timely manner was also reflected in the positive comments submitted by students regarding this area, as students actively praised teaching materials and other learning resources being provided in plenty of time before teaching took place.

### Students told us:

- » "The accessibility of pre-recorded lectures had been an issue for students – a transcription service and variable video speed option would be helpful."
- » "Some students reported that they would prefer lectures to be on Lecturecast (in order to be able to see the pointer during lectures and use the back/forward buttons) rather than on PowerPoint format with audio."
- » "Students raised concerns over the quality of captions accompanying lecture recordings."
- » "It was noted that the reading lists are sometimes only released an hour or two before the lectures, and it was requested that they are released at least one or two days in advance of the lectures."
- » "Students mentioned it was sometimes unclear to them what they needed to prepare from online Moodle materials in order to participate in lectures."
- » "Providing labelled slides or pictures and having a slide dedicated to abbreviations could be beneficial."

### Points for improvement:

- » Make sure that all lectures are available online via Lecturecast wherever possible and are uploaded in a timely manner, enabling students to review any material covered and further improve their grasp of the subject matter at hand. It is also important to ensure that sound quality and live captioning are of sufficient quality within the uploaded lecture.
- » Ensure that relevant resources such as lecture slides, readings and problem sets are available to students in sufficient time for them to cover any material needed before they are required to

complete any formative or summative work. Giving students the chance to review any relevant material before the module begins would also prove beneficial.

## Assessment Quality & Style

The issue of Assessment Quality/ Style, which also featured in the 2021 report, has received significantly more negative or neutral comments in minutes from the 2021-22 academic year than for 2020-21. In minutes from 2020-21 covered in this report 38% of comments regarding assessment quality and style were positive (N=99/264), however in minutes from 2021-22 this number drops to just 15% (N=30/203).

The main issue highlighted was the return to shorter, fixed-time examinations after the change in assessment style since Covid. Many students reported that they felt unprepared for such assessments as they had not had the chance to complete them in this style since arriving at UCL, with this issue being particularly highlighted by third year undergraduates about to take their final exams. In fact, many comments suggested a return to the 8- or 24-hour format that had been used in recent assessment periods. Comments regarding this were often made by students who were based overseas, as they felt that previous assessment formats were more conducive to working within different time zones.

### Students told us:

- » “Student representatives raised concerns about reverting to the 3-hour examinations relating to the unfamiliarity of this assessment, which had not been used in the previous two years, and the anxiety this was causing.”
- » “Many students have not had an exam season for a long time and a lot of students are not used to the exam setting.”
- » “Students based overseas were concerned they would be disadvantaged as compared to students based in the UK when completing their examinations; it was perceived that the needs of students based overseas had not been considered when the decision was taken to implement fixed-window examinations.”

### Points for improvement:

- » When deciding which format to use to conduct exams in future assessment periods, consider student input from this academic year regarding whether their preference is to use a shorter exam format, or whether using a longer exam form would be more appropriate in assessing students’ ability within the subject.
- » If reverting to a short exam format, make sure that students who have not had the chance to undertake this type of assessment in recent examination periods are able to familiarise themselves with this format, particularly through the use of mock exams and clear assessment guidelines.

## Communication

The issue of Communication has featured prominently in the priority reports written since Covid, appearing in both 2021 and 2020 (where this was an issue highlighted as receiving particularly negative feedback since the pandemic). The issues students faced regarding communication were often quite specific to their course or department, however many involved confusions over information received based on differing sources of information, as well as a lack of response to queries, or clarity over how to contact relevant staff members within their department on various issues.

Many students also cited difficulties with the communications channels used, particularly when information is circulated outside of established or agreed-upon channels (this varies from department to department, with Moodle, Microsoft Teams and Unitu commonly mentioned). Issues are unsurprisingly presented when changes are communicated at short notice, and students often highlighted communication regarding disruption to teaching and learning due to events such as Covid and strike action as particular points of dissatisfaction, as they were often left in the dark on various consequences of such events.

### **Students told us:**

- » “Some new students have reported not receiving emails sent via the mailing lists.”
- » “It was reported that some staff have recently been slow to respond to students’ emails, especially in relation to dissertation supervision.”
- » “Moodle forums are not always checked, or student questions are not always answered. There is a need for lecturers and seminar leaders to prioritise checking forums regularly and respond to students in the Moodle forums so that students can understand their course more.”
- » “Students are told an evening before that they’ll have tutorials the next day.”
- » “Students feel like there is a lack of proactiveness in informing students on the status of events that were promised but put on hold due to Covid.”

### **Points for improvement:**

- » Update students regarding any changes they need to be aware of as soon as information is available. When information is not yet available, or may be subject to change, keep students in the loop wherever possible. This is particularly important during events that cause significant disruption such as Covid and strike action.
- » Given that different cohorts have different expectations and processes regarding preferred methods and structures of communication, there is no one size fits all approach to communicating with students across UCL. However, consistency is crucial regardless of what means of communication is used for different issues, so that students know where to look for the latest information.

## Assessment Preparation

The area of Assessment Preparation received overwhelmingly negative or neutral comments in this year's SSCC minutes, with only 10% of coded data regarding this issue being positive (N=22/211). This area, which covers 'comments on whether students feel adequately prepared for assessment, or whether assessment reflects the taught content of their programme', included comments similar to those found when discussing timing of assessment, such as a lack of adequate practice before exams and exams being scheduled too soon after the end of other activities such as placements, disrupting assessment preparation.

Many students also reported issues with workload around assessments having a significant effect on their ability to prepare for and complete assessments effectively. This was particularly an issue with coursework, which more commonly falls around other taught content and in the middle of term. Students also found that some areas assessed were not covered in their lectures or seminars, meaning that on some occasions they were required to fill in the gaps by teaching themselves in preparation for assessments.

### Students told us:

- » "There is concern around the lack of study time for exams which follow straight after placements in April and in July. Students believe it is unfair to have exams a few days after the placements as it will be hard to study during the week, especially as it is likely to be 9-5."
- » "Students are starting to trade off lessons for completing coursework."
- » Some students also reported feeling like the balance between 'individual research' and taught content is unreasonable. They think that the coursework is overly difficult / take too much time and it is affecting their university experience in a negative way."
- » "Students felt there was a large gap between material taught and material they needed to teach themselves in order to prepare for the exam. Students note that there is a lot of material they need to learn for the exam that they did not learn from preparing for or attending lectures."

### Points for improvement:

- » Where possible both during and at the end of modules, ensure that students have sufficient time to prepare for assessments in the same module, both in the form of coursework as well as examinations.
- » Cross-check the assessed content with the taught content within a given module, ensuring that students are not required to prepare for any areas that have not been covered.

## Assessment Criteria

The topic of Assessment Criteria also appeared as a negative in the 2020 report, and this year only five positive comments were submitted on this issue, whilst 78% of comments received regarding this area were negative (N=93/119). A lack of access to clear guidelines regarding expectations for assessments was the most common refrain of students in this area, which caused confusion and even on occasion for assessments to be misunderstood entirely. In cases such as this, students often asked for more guidance or explanatory documents related to the assessment to be provided, including completed assessments with explanations regarding how to meet this assessment criteria.

This area was unsurprisingly highlighted disproportionately by first year undergraduate students, who are still becoming accustomed to university assessments and what is expected. Some of these issues that were common for first years, such as expectations and criteria around bibliographies, references, and citations, were also common for students in other years and levels of study, with students requesting clarity on these practices wherever possible as they are often different between different departments or even individual modules.

### Students told us:

- » “Not always clear where you can find information on mark schemes or assessment criteria.”
- » “There needs to be less ambiguity with the questions for mark assessments. Clear and pointed instructions are better for planning and writing purposes.”
- » “Some students may be unclear on the differences between the examining criteria used in schools compared to a Higher Education setting.”
- » “It was reported students are finding it difficult to understand coursework briefs and asked if it would be possible for the information to be clearer, and whether staff can provide coursework examples along with the marking explanation for each grade boundary.”
- » “Multiple tutors had been asked to clarify about the use of bibliographies, and they all had given different answers. Some students had been encouraged to provide references, but this had not been a clear yes or no answer.”

### Points for improvement:

- » Ensure that assessment criteria are provided in a clear manner for all forms of assessment and is available for students to access via Moodle.
- » Provide examples of completed assessments students can refer to in order to better understand how to meet assessment criteria. This would be particularly beneficial to first year undergraduate students.
- » Make sure that expectations for referencing and bibliographies are clear for each form of assessment.

## Class Timetabling

The issue of Class Timetabling also featured in the 2020 version of the report, particularly in comments from before the effects of Covid were felt in the 2019-20 academic year. Almost 80% of the comments received on this topic this year were negative (N=99/125).

Some of the issues raised related to this area surround problems with the new hybrid style of teaching, with students reporting issues with balancing timetables that included both online and face-to-face learning, especially when these sessions are scheduled close together. However, issues were also raised with timetabling of solely in-person teaching, with some students reporting that in-person timetables did not leave enough time to get to their next scheduled class in a different building.

Several students also reported issues with the workload their class timetabling provided, requesting gaps in packed schedules when there were numerous back-to-back contact hours. Some students even reported clashes in their timetable between core and optional modules. Finally, being able to access timetables was also a problem in some cases, as well as students receiving their timetable after term started, or timetabling changes being made at short notice.

### Students told us:

- » “A concern that had been raised was that sometimes an online session started too soon after a face-to-face session and some students had not had enough time to travel back home in time to join the online session.”
- » “There is no time between classes to get to the next class in a different building.”
- » “Students also requested gaps within the timetable as the number of sessions might be overwhelming.”
- » “Accessing the timetable/schedule is problematic for some students.”
- » “Timetables have been changed last minute quite frequently this semester, which students have found disruptive to their day and their commutes.”

### Points for improvement:

- » When structuring timetables, bear in mind whether contact hours are face-to-face or remote, leaving sufficient time for students to transition between the two. It is also worth considering student workload, particularly over the course of an individual day, as well as the distance between timetabled activity if the sessions are back-to-back.
- » Provide students with their timetables before teaching begins each term and give as much notice as possible for any timetabling changes, with clear and concise information communicating the change.
- » Minimise timetabling clashes between core and optional modules when there is only a small selection available to the cohort (meaning that a significant number of students are likely to experience a clash).

# Recommendations

## 1) Assessments

The issue of assessments has again dominated the negative areas within this report, covering various elements of the assessment experience from the timing of and preparation for the assessments and the assessment content or criteria when these take place. Assessment is a crucial component of the student academic experience and determines student outcomes and attainment, so it is unsurprising that this is an area where thorough feedback is provided.

Based on the feedback provided from SSCC minutes, the report makes the following recommendations to UCL for improving this area:

- a. Encourage more use of the CHART tool across UCL, including asking departments to consider the timing of assessments when using the tool
- b. Encourage programme teams to review modules learning outcomes and assessment to ensure close alignment with the assessment load model.
- c. When re-designing and reviewing learning outcomes for modules, ensure that assessment criteria is aligned to Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidelines, and that programme teams are discussing this criteria with students in a contextualised manner.
- d. Explore bringing assessments closer to when assessment content was taught as part of any review of the academic teaching year, whilst making sure that any changes are evidence-based and incorporate student feedback.

## 2) Communications

From this report it is clear that greater consistency and clarity is need in communication across the institution so that students have the relevant information that they need and are aware of the support offered. This area also ties into some of the important aspects of other points of feedback within this report such as Learning Resources, where the infrastructure for change such as more widespread use of Lecturecast is available but the benefits of this are not communicated across UCL.

As a result of this feedback, the report makes the following recommendations to UCL for improving this area:

- a. Encourage larger programmes to consider how information is communicated and shared amongst their cohort, including student preferences for communication.
- b. Advocate for closer coordination between programme and module leaders to enable consistent communications for students in a particular cohort.
- c. Develop guidance on communicating with students with VPESE Student Engagement Team, in collaboration with VPPE Communications, Strategy and Planning Team, Students' Union and Student Editorial Board. Disseminate findings and best practice through existing channels such as the Central Student Communications MS Team and Internal Communications Community of Practice.
- d. Conduct a review of student communications across the institution, utilising the expertise of existing communications networks, including the Internal Communications Community of Practice and Student Editorial Board.
- e. Communicate the benefits of lecture capture in supporting student learning to staff across UCL.



# **Student Priorities for Education**

## **Trends in Student Feedback**

**2021-22**

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