



Student Priorities *for*

Education Report 2023

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Introduction

The annual Student Priorities for Education Report aims to provide a snapshot of the issues facing UCL students, including recommended practices for staff across UCL. The report serves as an accompaniment to the work of Students Staff Consultative Committees (SSCCs) at a departmental level. Drawing on the qualitative analysis of 302 sets of SSCC minutes, the report offers a comprehensive analysis of student feedback throughout this academic year.

One of the most common questions academic representatives ask is how can the feedback that they provide make a real, tangible difference when change does not seem sufficient or possible at a programme or departmental level. Through using the insights gained from the SSCC minutes, this report aims to answer that question.

Each year, students provide an enormous amount of feedback to UCL and Students' Union UCL, both formally and informally. In comparison to the previous academic year, as well as in comparison to pre-pandemic analysis, this year's SSCC meetings have unfortunately seen a rise in negative sentiment in a number of areas, often interlinking with external factors such as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students' ability to engage effectively in their learning, and the lasting impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on impacted cohorts. To help understand this sentiment, and to allow us to propose appropriate action moving forward, this year's report has taken a broader, more in-depth look at the educational experience at UCL.

This report offers insight into six main themes and delves into the areas commented on most frequently within those themes. The report also looks to wider sector research and literature in order to understand both where we are, and where we should be aiming to go. Through taking this approach, we have been able to provide a comprehensive overview of UCL students' priorities for education.

We hope that this report informs and shapes discussion around the academic experience at UCL, and that the student voice continues to play a pivotal role in shaping education at UCL.



Hamza Ahmed

Education Officer, 2022-2023

Progress Against Recommendations

In the 2022 Student Priorities for Education Report, nine different recommendations were made across two main areas: Assessment and Feedback and Communication. 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 and Feedback. The table provides an update on the progress of these recommendations as of May 2023.



Assessment & Feedback

We recommended: Encourage more use of the CHART tool across UCL, including asking departments to consider the timing of assessments when using the tool.

UCL's update: The CHART tool has been used with approximately 110 programmes, over 300 members of staff, and Assessment Design Student Partners. CHART is the prototype, and the Education Change Portfolio was managing development of link to Portico. However, there may be value in waiting for the Curriculum Management (CM) work to progress as a new CM system would likely include assessment mapping/planning functionality. This is a priority in the reconfigured Education Change Portfolio.

We recommended: Encourage programme teams to review modules learning outcomes and assessment to ensure close alignment with the assessment load model.

UCL's update: The assessment load model is central to the Arena-led Programme Development Workshops. Assessment Design Student Partners work with staff to create assessment charts (using the CHART Tool) and this is used by programme leaders to review their assessment plan, providing a valuable opportunity for new programmes to map out their assessments and associated workloads. Again, the new CM system may prove beneficial here.

We recommended: 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.

UCL's update: This process takes place as part of the Programme Design Workshops with Arena colleagues working with staff to align programme learning outcomes and module learning outcomes to assessments. Throughout this process, they have reflected on the importance of assessment design as part of good programme design is promoted in the Good Practice Guide

We recommended: 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.

UCL's update: An additional supported assessment period has been raised through the conversations to develop a UCL Education Framework and will be explored further with colleagues as part of the Strategic Education Projects. Faculties have been working on addressing these issues locally, where relevant, through Faculty Education Plans.

Communication

We recommended: Encourage larger programmes to consider how information is communicated and shared amongst their cohort, including student preferences for communication.

UCL's update: Larger programmes that have identified issues around communications (e.g., via National Student Survey (NSS) results and free text comments that need to be addressed) are now captured and managed via the introduction of the Faculty Education Plans.

We recommended: Advocate for closer coordination between programme and module leaders to enable consistent communications for students in a particular cohort.

UCL's update: A recommendation was added to the PGS Survey Report asking Faculties to work with departments collectively to curate communications and take a consistent approach, particularly with regards to assessment information.

We recommended: Develop guidance on communicating with students with the Student Engagement Team, in collaboration with VPEE 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.

UCL's update: There have been multiple changes within the Vice Provost Education & Student Experience office including the appointment of a new Pro Vice Provost for Student Academic Engagement. Work has also started on developing a new strategic partnership framework with the Students' Union and colleagues in VPESE. This will include a focus on different forms and methods of communication and engagement.

We recommended: 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.

UCL's update: A review of internal communications is currently being led by the Provost's Office in collaboration with EE. This includes reviewing how key information and decisions are relayed to students. Work has also begun on drafting a Student Communication Strategy. As part of this work new initiatives are being scoped such as: 1) a 'Student Perspective Panel', whereby messaging is reviewed with students before final publication; 2) an 'inbox review' from September-October 2023 to better understand traffic into students mailbox; 3) an overhaul of the all-students newsletter 'myUCL'; 4) a move to a new CMS for central email marketing with Microsoft Dynamics, allowing segmentation and greater insight into student engagement; 5) widening use all student app, UCL Go; 6) Greater student voice throughout all central/education messaging through

VPEE Student Journalist Scheme, Content Creators, and SU Sabbatical Officers.

Work has also continued dialogue and access with our students and senior leaders through hosting our first Student Town Hall with the Provost, Vice-Provost (Education & Student Experience), and SU Sabbatical Officers in May 2023. There is also a Student Focus Group planned for June/July 2023.

We recommended: Communicate the benefits of lecture capture in supporting student learning to staff across UCL.

UCL's update: Whilst acceptance of the importance and value of teaching recordings grew during the pandemic, there remains a group of staff who are unwilling to be recorded. Development of a policy for recording of teaching was halted due to disagreement with UCU representatives and interim guidance was published ready for 2021/22 and updated for 2022/23. Work on this is restarting now, and policy development will be accompanied by a communications activity.



Teaching and Learning

In keeping with previous Student Priorities for Education reports, a significant proportion of the SSCC coded data related to Teaching and Learning (N = 1747/5136). The three main sub-themes were Teaching Delivery, Programme or Module Content, and Learning Resources. Whilst some students reported satisfaction with the Teaching Delivery and Programme or Module Content, there was also growing dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Teaching Delivery and Learning Resources. Specifically, many students sought greater consistency with the quality of Learning Resources, and some struggled with the pace of delivery. This mixed experience follows national trends, with 52% of students finding their university experience worse in some ways and better in others in comparison to what they expected.¹

Teaching Delivery

36% (N = 624/1747) of the SSCC comments within Teaching and Learning related to Teaching Delivery. Teaching Delivery is arguably one of the most important aspects of a student's Teaching and Learning experience at UCL; it directly influences a student's engagement, understanding, and overall learning experience. Looking to the SSCC minutes, the feedback regarding Teaching Delivery at UCL for this academic year presents a mixed picture, with negative sentiment around Teaching Delivery increasing by 18% in comparison to the previous academic year (52% vs 34%). Whilst some students expressed satisfaction with high-quality teaching and passionate staff, alongside an appreciation for the return to face-to-face learning, concerns emerged regarding the associated costs. Given the current cost of living crisis, these associated costs led to a significant number of students feeling that their attendance had been hindered, and their academic performance impacted. Acknowledging and addressing these concerns is crucial to ensure an improved learning experience for UCL students.

Looking to the 2022 National Student Survey (NSS), the UCL undergraduate student response was overwhelmingly positive with regards to teaching. 82% of respondents were satisfied with their teaching, 80% were satisfied with their learning opportunities, and 87% found their course intellectually stimulating.² Given that the purpose of the NSS is to help "inform prospective students' choices, provide data that supports universities and colleges to improve the student experience, and support public accountability", it is encouraging to see this sentiment shared so broadly.³

Unfortunately, the SSCC minutes suggest a more divided opinion of Teaching Delivery for this academic year.

Positively, students often stated that they were happy with their programme thanks to high quality, engaging teaching and teaching staff who display a clear passion for their subject. Students were also

overwhelmingly positive about the return to face-to-face teaching, with many students seeing this as an improvement in comparison to previous years: “Students are enjoying face-to-face teaching and appreciated the interactivity it provided.” This aligns with national sentiment which shows that generally, students want more in-person teaching.⁴ Returning to face-to-face teaching was also associated with students being significantly more likely to agree that their degree was good value for the money. The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) also supports the value of face-to-face delivery, with postgraduate taught students who received in-person teaching demonstrating higher levels of satisfaction with their teaching delivery than students who received online or blended learning.⁵

However, despite appreciation for lectures returning to in-person delivery, some students struggled to meet the associated costs. For example, research undertaken by Students' Union UCL on behalf of the Russell Group Students' Unions (RGSUs) has shown that many students have been forced to take on additional work in order to afford basic living costs, and that this has had a direct impact on their ability to attend teaching.⁶ Importantly, this is not a small pocket of students; 17% of students who stated that they were in paid employment are working for more than 30 hours per week. This figure rises to 24% for disabled students, 36% for estranged or care experienced students, and 35% for those with caring responsibilities. Simply put, the cost of living crisis – due to the rise in inflation for food, housing and energy – has exacerbated the already precarious position that many students find themselves in. Throughout the research, multiple students reported missing timetabled lectures and labs or skipping teaching entirely where they would have to travel, especially at peak hours. Indeed, as a result of students being forced to miss teaching, half of UCL students stated that the current cost of living crisis has impacted their academic performance.⁷

Within SSCC meetings, multiple students also raised concerns regarding the pace of delivery. For example, one student said: “Almost all the students are unhappy with how this module [is delivered], with many saying that teaching feels very passive and fast paced.” Students also reported that fast delivery often led to difficulty understanding the content: “Students are finding materials difficult to understand and classes are moving at a fast pace.”

Another area of frustration for students that was raised consistently in SSCCs was with the specific teaching methods of some staff. Whether it be staff reading off slides and providing no additional information, missing topics, or digressing into unrelated discussions, student dissatisfaction with specific aspects of Teaching Delivery was not uncommon among SSCC minutes. However, not all students were specific in their criticism. For example, one student simply remarked, “Modules were not well taught.” To better help staff understand where improvement is needed, SSCC student members should be encouraged to fully articulate their points of view.

A final area of discussion within Teaching Delivery is the impact of industrial action. Whilst many students have generally been in support of industrial action – as demonstrated through students voting to support the planned University & College Union (UCU) industrial action –, many students have also raised concerns about how the industrial action will affect teaching, and their ability to

catch-up on missed material.⁸ Again, this is consistent with the national picture, with a large number of respondents to the 2022 Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES) feeling that their learning experience has been negatively impacted by the occurrence of strikes.⁹ On the whole, however, industrial action did not represent a significant concern for the student representatives attending SSCC meetings.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“The teaching was felt to be engaging and challenging.”

“Students have complained about the delivery of the module. 25 out of 29 students (85%) say the tutor did not clearly explain the course material. 26 out of 29 students (90%) say they are not confident that the tutor can deliver the Term 2 course material to a high standard.”

“Overall, the students have had a good experience. They enjoy the research-based approach, and many have noticed an improvement in critically reading of scientific papers and data interpretation.”

“The main issue is that the course is not taught with enough details. Students find that there is no cohesion between the lectures and the resource materials.”

Programme or Module Content

29% (N = 515/1747) of the SSCC comments within Teaching and Learning concerned Programme or Module Content. Again, Programme or Module Content is central to a student’s university experience. When done well, it provides students with relevant, comprehensive, and up to date knowledge and skills, and equips them for future success. In comparison to the previous report, Programme or Module Content has seen a 2% increase in positive sentiment (38% vs 40%), and a 4% decrease in negative sentiment (53% vs 49%). Here, experiences varied significantly between department. Whilst some students found their Programme or Module Content well-structured and reasonable, others expressed concerns over the breadth and depth.

When speaking positively, students found their Programme or Module Content “interesting”, “engaging”, and “relevant”. One particular area of satisfaction was guest lecturers. Students spoke incredibly positively about the opportunity to hear directly from specialists, feeling that this enhanced the quality of their learning: “Trainees found content interesting, with good guest lectures and well thought out assessments.”

Interestingly, one area of dissatisfaction was the breadth of content. Whilst some students felt that their Programme or Module Content was too in-depth, others reported that theirs was too broad.

Within the SSCC minutes, both left some students feeling that the content was “boring” or “irrelevant”. However, other students accepted that this may “just be the nature of the module.” It is therefore important for programme or module leads to effectively communicate the aims of their content with students and help them understand why the content has been planned this way. Conversely, it is also important for programme or module leads to take student feedback on board and act on that feedback when appropriate.

There was also concern from students regarding the quantity of content. Whilst UCL prides itself for being a world-class institution that pioneers new approaches to teaching and learning, many students feel that the balance is off when it comes to the quantity of content. For example, many students report that there is “too much content” and that “the volume of work is difficult to keep up with.” For some students, this led to assessments feeling rushed, hectic, and unnecessarily time-consuming. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the nature of the courses, this feedback was more common among master’s students.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students feel that it’s a shame that topics are not covered in a lot of detail, but they understand that this may be due to the nature of the module itself. “

“Students are generally happy with the lectures each day. The content is interesting, and lecturers are very good and engaging.”

“The volume of work was difficult to keep up with.”

“Students consider the programme challenging, interesting.”

Learning Resources

16% (N = 274/1747) of all SSCC comments within Teaching and Learning related to Learning Resources. Negative sentiment around Learning Resources has increased by 15% since the previous academic year (52% 2021/2022 vs 67% 2022/2023). Like Teaching Delivery, sentiment in this area was significantly more negative than the NSS results, where students reported 87% satisfaction with course specific resources, and 89% satisfaction with library resources.¹⁰ Key concerns included the quality, availability, and accessibility of Learning Resources. Given that Learning Resources are instrumental in facilitating independent learning, expanding knowledge, and enhancing students’ academic performance, the concerns here should not be overlooked.

Effective learning resources play a crucial role in supporting students’ academic performance and in improving learner outcomes.¹¹ Feedback in this area highlighted the value of comprehensive, timely, and tailored learning resources, and the comparative dissatisfaction when students did not receive

them. When students were positive about learning resources, they spoke about “useful recordings for rewatching later” and that they had “good access to learning resources”. They also praised the variety, detail, and appropriateness of the materials received. In comparison, dissatisfied students primarily spoke about resources being provided too late: “[We] would benefit from having access to the readings prior to the seminar”, “Lecture materials were released late, providing students with very little time to go through the asynchronous videos, before the in-person lectures”, “The lecture materials for the module are posted very late the night before the lecture, which does not give students sufficient time to prepare for the lecture.”

Looking to the sector more broadly, the 2022 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) found that postgraduate research students are generally positive about their learning resources, with many describing them as intellectually stimulating and remarking that they have access to a good range of resources.¹² However, research on building belonging in higher education found that this is not the case for all students. Rather, 57% of students with disabilities reported difficulty accessing learning resources, and students “condemned incidences where students with accessibility needs had to specifically request resources to be made accessible.”¹³ When discussing the topic of accessibility, students praised lecturers who automatically used fonts and colours which were accessible to students who were colour blind or had dyslexia, and lecturers who used a wide range of learning resources such as text, videos, and audio recordings. Students also noted the importance of subtitles.

Within the SSCC meetings, the accessibility of learning resources was repeatedly raised: “Students thanked the team for adding the captions to the blended learning and live session recordings, the students who needed them found the material more accessible.” Undoubtedly, building an accessible education is critical for the success of all students.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students are never sure what to prepare as won’t know what case study they are looking at until they come into the lecture. It would be best to know at least a week in advance what the lecture content will be in each module.”

“Finding the online resources helpful especially the example briefs.”

“There seems to be a lack of resources and support towards the project.”

“The lecturer adapted the style of slides to the students’ feedback, and they found it very useful.”

Examples of Best Practice

- Learning resources should be provided in a timely and accessible manner.
- Staff should be aware of the support services that can assist students who face financial hardship, to ensure that they can fully participate in teaching activities.
- The pace of delivery should be assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure that students are able to absorb and engage with the material effectively.



Assessment and Feedback

21% (N = 1100/5136) of all SSCC comments related to Assessment and Feedback. The three main sub-themes were Assessment and Preparation, Timing of Assessment, and Assessment Quality/Style. Whilst some students reported satisfaction with the efforts made by their department to ensure that there was adequate preparation, feedback, and timings, there were also widespread concerns about assessment bunching and insufficient, untimely feedback. Overall, negative comments accounted for 79% of all comments within Assessment and Feedback. These findings are perhaps unsurprising given that it is not the first-time concerns are being raised. There has been negative sentiment surrounding Assessment and Feedback in previous iterations of this report, throughout the Students' Union's TEF submission, and across the wider HE sector.^{14,15}

Assessment Preparation

21% (N = 232/1100) of the SSCC comments within Assessment and Feedback related to Assessment Preparation. Through adequately preparing students for assessments, staff are able to enhance their students' understanding, confidence, and performance. Unfortunately, in comparison to the previous report, students felt significantly more negative about Assessment Preparation in this year's SSCC minutes, increasing from 53% to 77%. Here, many students expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of practice papers, alongside frustration regarding the quality of feedback received for formative assessments in advance of formally assessed pieces.

This negative sentiment was also witnessed in Students' Union UCL's Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) focus groups. Here, students reported that they often struggled with information being insufficient and overly generic to truly help them prepare for their assessments. For example, attendees spoke about a need for improved clarity around assessment criteria to ensure that students are not being unfairly penalised. The SAES (2022) report supports the value of effective feedback for future assessments.¹⁶ Students outlined their desire for specific feedback that would enable them to improve their performance in future assessments. Interestingly, nominations for Students' Union UCL's Student Choice Awards show that students who do receive comprehensive, timely feedback feel incredibly positive about those specific staff members, believing that their input is vital to their future academic success.¹⁷

Students also expressed a desire for additional practice papers or examples of previous submissions, believing that this would enhance their subject knowledge and assessment confidence: "Students were not given examples or practiced interpretations during the practical sessions. It would help to have some practice assessments prior to the main assessment." Again, when this was done, students responded positively, finding the additional assessment preparation resources beneficial: "students who submitted drafts for some modules felt this was very beneficial, and where modules did not offer

this, they felt more nervous about submitting their main assignments without having received any draft feedback.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Some students felt they were not very prepared to begin their research project.”

“Students suggested a formative draft thesis submission halfway through the year, possibly a draft introduction. Some supervisors did set this, and students found it beneficial.”

“[Students] also asked for more worked examples for [the module] and to be able to access online assessments after the deadline to see where they had gone wrong as feedback.”

Timing of Assessments

16% (N = 178/1100) of the SSCC comments coded within Assessment and Feedback related to Timing of Assessments. The Timing of Assessments is of high importance given that it allows for appropriate planning, and for students to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills. As in previous reports, Timing of Assessment was a prevalent issue in this year’s SSCC minutes, with 83% (N = 147/178) of comments related to this area being negative.

Despite last year’s recommendation to “Encourage more use of the CHART tool across UCL, including asking departments to consider the timing of assessments when using the tool”, students remain concerned about the bunching of assessments, with many feeling that they should be “spaced out more”.¹⁸ This was the case among both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and is perhaps unsurprising given that data shows that London students tend to have more assessments than non-London students.¹⁹ When discussing the issue in SSCCs, students stated that when deadlines fell within close proximity to each other, their levels of stress increased, and their academic performance suffered: “Students found the timings of three assessment deadlines stressful as there were a few days apart from each other.” Dissatisfaction in this area was also highlighted in focus groups for the Students’ Union’s TEF submission, with many students feeling that the timing of their assessments often resulted in an unbearable workload.²⁰ The negative impact of assessment bunching has also been highlighted in the SAES.²¹ To help counter this, Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) advocate for institutions ensuring appropriate frequency and timing of online teaching and assessment to help alleviate student fatigue and increase general satisfaction.

When students did have gaps between deadlines, this was consistently well received: “Students felt the gaps between projects was good and students were satisfied with the scheduling of projects”, “Students were pleased with the distribution of assessment deadlines and felt they were able to complete their work in good time.” Specifically, students were grateful when academics were

understanding and provided flexibility with deadlines: “The cohort is grateful that professor provided more time for submissions where required.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students felt pressured with the deadline for the assessment being too close to each other.”

“Assessment deadlines could be spread out more; students noted that during January to March there were no assessments until the end of March and then two at the same time in April.”

“Students have raised [that there is an] issue with deadlines (essays and exams) being set around the same time.”

Assessment Quality/ Style

17% (N = 185/1100) of SSCC comments coded within Assessment and Feedback related to Assessment Quality/ Style. Effective Assessment Quality/ Style enables students to demonstrate their academic progress and engage in critical thinking. It also allows staff to accurately assess their intended learning outcomes. Disappointingly, 79% of comments within this sub-theme were coded negatively, in comparison to 62% of comments in 2022’s report. This increase in negative sentiment is consistent across all sub-themes within Assessment and Feedback. Significant concerns within this sub-theme were assessment weightings, and the change in Assessment Style following the formats adopted during – and post – the pandemic.

An area of contention around Assessment Quality/ Style concerns shortened timeframes for online exams and a return to face-to-face, handwritten exams, with many students struggling to adjust to the new conditions: “Year 2 students expressed discomfort that a heavily weighted exam for a course is using an unfamiliar format.” Given that the majority of students have become accustomed to extended online assessments following COVID-19 – and research from Advance HE and HEPI showing that the majority of students favour online assessment with longer timeframes – it is unsurprising that students are concerned.²² Additionally, students also expressed dissatisfaction with modules where single assessments carried a 90% or 100% weighting: “Students complained about having single assessments for modules”, “students have suggested that modules with 100% group coursework should be split with half individual coursework and half group coursework. Some students have had bad experiences with unreliable group members.”

Since the start of the academic year, the quality and style of assessment has been a significant topic of discussion amongst the UCL student body, with most Faculty Representatives campaigning on a platform of increased clarity regarding what exam conditions would look like.²³ Similarly, Assessment

Quality/ Style featured prominently in the NSS 2022 qualitative feedback, with 12% of all negative comments (N = 170/1443) relating to this sub-theme.

Students also expressed a desire for assessment methods that are appropriate for their course of study, with some feeling that module assessments did not accurately capture or assess their learning: “50% of the students who responded to the [Student Representative’s] survey consider assessment methods are not accurate; they think it is not good enough that the overall mark is based on an essay when they have attended and participated in a class for 10 weeks and those skills have not been taken into account.”

Where students were satisfied, it was often because they found the assessment format interesting and varied: “Trainees found content interesting, with good guest lectures and well thought out assessments.” Additionally, students also appreciated modules who had retained the flexibility and format of online exams that they had seen in previous years: “The MSc students appreciated the flexibility and format of the online final exams in Term 3.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students are happy with the module, but the assessment structure is difficult, and the video dialogue is proving stressful as it differs from standard essay-type assignments.”

“[Exam duration] has been shortened to 2/3 hours whereby students had 24 hours previously.”

“Two hours for two essays seems unfair and illogical to given time limit - when do scientists have two hours to write two papers?”

“Very positive feedback received for the May presentation experience. Overall, students found it useful, interesting, and not too stressful.”

Examples of Best Practice

- Feedback should be comprehensive and provided in a timely manner.
- Assessment deadlines should be staggered to prevent student burn out and reduce stress.
- Consider the balance of formative and summative assignments for your module and programme to enhance subject knowledge and assessment confidence.
- Assessment patterns should not change post module selection when students have already made their choices based on the information provided to them.



Student Support

12% (N = 602/5136) of all comments related to Student Support. The three main sub-themes were Students Support Processes, Practical and Academic Personal Support, and Careers and Personal Development. Generally, students emphasised the importance of effective support structures and initiatives for students' wellbeing, academic success, and personal growth. However, the key concern throughout the sub-themes related to inconsistencies within these processes, and varying access to the appropriate Student Support. Student feedback highlighted the need for Student Support structures to be fully integrated into every UCL student's life, as opposed to being viewed as a 'nice add on'.

Student Support Processes

18% (N = 110/602) of the SSCC comments coded within Student Support related to Student Support Processes. The opportunity to access effective Student Support Processes, such as structures, schemes and initiatives put in place to ensure that students are supported throughout their learning, are essential for the wellbeing, academic success, and personal development of all students. As seen in other areas, student opinion was split here with 56% of the comments negatively coded, and 32% positively coded. The main topics raised included appreciation for specific support staff, confusion regarding specific processes, and inconsistencies both between and within cohorts.

Staff who work in Student Support Processes, such as Personal Tutors or Student Advisors, are often viewed by students as the first point of call to directly address their individual needs and seek help and support where appropriate. It is therefore essential that students are aware of the Student Support Processes on offer and can access them easily. Positively, in comparison to previous years, the current academic year saw a rise in the number of students meeting with their Personal Tutors during the academic welcome period (69% vs 74%).²⁴

Within the SSCC minutes, many students praised specific staff members for the time and energy they had dedicated to them. For example, one student praised departmental staff "for being so readily available and supportive", and a member of staff stated that "Student feedback on the Tutor Group has been very positive." Based on these remarks, it is clear that many members of staff consistently demonstrate supportive behaviour through helping students navigate UCL-wide Support Processes, as well as being Support Processes in and of themselves. Positively, these experiences indicate that there is a wealth of best practice within the university's own community.

Unfortunately, there was a sizeable number of students who expressed concerns about the difficulties they faced when accessing their Personal Tutors. Some students were unaware of who their Personal Tutor was, and "some have not been assigned a Personal Tutor" in the first place. Consequently, multiple students remarked that there is a need for better communication and clarity in the Personal

Tutor system to ensure that students receive the necessary support and guidance. An issue which often compounded these issues was a lack of communication. Several students highlighted the importance of clear and timely communication from staff members, and expressed frustration when emails go unanswered or important information fails to be communicated: “Some tutors have been unresponsive failing to contact their students”, “students seeking module and careers support after term 2 are not receiving responses from academics, either by email or in Moodle forums.” Given that research from HEPI and AdvanceHE shows that students appreciate personal check-ins and the opportunity for individualised support, it is unsurprising that a failure to receive such support results in dissatisfaction.²⁵

Based on these contradictory experiences, it is clear that students are subjected to a Student Support Process lottery. Arguably, the word “some” – used commonly within this sub-theme – epitomises the inconsistencies that students face: “Some tutors have been unresponsive failing to contact their students”, “Most feedback was positive—but some students said that they do need more support from supervisors.” This ‘lottery’ experience was also highlighted in Students’ Union UCL’s TEF submission. Here, it was found that undergraduate students had widely varying experiences of the Personal Tutoring system. For examples, whilst some students received proactive and compassionate support that they found “helpful”, others reported difficulties in arranging meetings, their Personal Tutor having limited knowledge of their subject, and a high turnover of Personal Tutors. When students did receive consistent and effective support from their Personal Tutors, this was an area that they reflected most positively on when speaking of their time at UCL, and students commonly reported that Personal Tutors had a significant positive impact on their wellbeing, academic outcomes and career aspirations.

The experiences outlined in this year’s SSCC meetings contribute to Students’ Union UCL’s existing knowledge of the inconsistencies within UCL’s Personal Tutoring system. We therefore welcome the current review into Personal Tutoring at UCL in order to move from areas of exceptional best practice within UCL to consistent levels of high-quality support for all students.²⁶

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Feedback on personal tutor/tutee interaction was mixed, with some students reporting they had had regular contact with their personal tutor and others needing more support.”

“[My] personal tutor experience has been mediocre, if not poor.”

“All in attendance were happy with personal tutoring over the summer term.”

“Most students have not met with their personal tutors for terms 2 and 3, again many felt it would have been very useful to communicate with tutors especially during placement. We have been told our tutors would reach out to us which is why students have not pushed to arrange meetings.”

Practical and Academic Personal Support

A fifth (N = 116/602) of SSCC comments coded within Student Support concerned Practical and Academic Personal Support. Again, students were divided in this area, with 54% coded negatively, and 25% coded positively. Practical and Academic Personal Support concerns the support that students are provided for learning outside of teaching hours. This support enables students to reinforce their learning and to receive both emotional and motivational support where needed.

When Practical and Academic Personal Support were delivered effectively, students spoke about feeling valued, supported, and empowered: “Students are happy with the programme and felt happy with the support given”, “It is still so stressful figuring out what I will do and how, but I feel supported.” Indeed, when support was provided, students were quick to acknowledge the effort, care, and consideration demonstrated by staff.

Similar to the concerns raised in Student Support Processes, dissatisfaction in this area often related to inconsistencies both between and within cohorts. That is, a student’s experience of Practical and Academic Personal Support was often based on luck. For example, whilst some students feel that they have benefitted from proactive staff members who offer bespoke academic skill workshops or individualised pastoral support, other students have been left feeling that there is a lack of resources and support available to them.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“The dissertation workshops are very useful-will help students get more out of supervisor meeting.”

“First workshop has already been held which was really helpful for structuring presentation

A need for more office hours available with instructors when the assessment is released.

“Some students are lacking prior knowledge of the programme and need additional support.”

Careers and Personal Development

When looking at the SSCC minutes, comments relating to Careers and Personal Development account for 14% (N = 85/602) of all Student Support comments. Careers and Personal Development play a vital

role within UCL; they provide students with the necessary guidance, resources, and opportunities to explore their interests, develop valuable skills, and navigate their career paths effectively. In comparison to last year's report, this year's analysis reveals a 27% rise in negative sentiment (29% vs 56%). However, there has also been a 2% rise in positive sentiment (18% vs 20%). This suggests that in previous years a greater proportion of comments within this sub-theme had been coded as neutral.

When speaking positively about Careers and Personal Development, many students praised the quality of career events, and stated that the opportunities were appreciated and well-received: "Career events are very good. Most who attended found them very useful. The tech and consulting events are well received."

In contrast, negative sentiment often centred around students feeling limited by the opportunities on offer. Given that only 42% of UCL students are confident about finding a job after graduation, it is understandable that students want to be as informed as possible about the various career paths and postgraduate study routes that they could take.²⁷ As one student said, "[I would like] advice and guidance on jobs and careers following the course, especially for those that do not have core professions." To help prevent certain professions from dominating career events, one group of students suggested that they "would like a session (perhaps with Alumni) to understand potential different career pathways that are open to them." Given the wealth of knowledge and expertise within the UCL Alumni community, further collaboration with these individuals would be prudent for all involved.

A final area of note within Careers and Personal Development was, again, an issue which stemmed from inconsistent communication. For example, whilst students who were aware of CV training and cover letter writing workshops appreciated the opportunity to develop employability skills, many students were unaware of these opportunities. Given that most of these opportunities are provided centrally by UCL Careers, improved communication between the central team and departments/programmes may help reduce the number of students unaware of the opportunities available to them.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

"Students would like targeted sessions for healthcare on how to improve their CV, LinkedIn profile, how to network with people from the industry and public speaking. They really like the fairs and said there is lots of opportunities, but they believe they need more basic things covered too."

"Trainees reported that the majority of the cohort had now secured job offers post-graduation."

"Career workshops for international students earlier in the academic could be beneficial for a lot of students."

“Students thanked the Department of its willingness to work with PhD students on issues related to employment post-qualification.”

Examples of Best Practice

- All students should be made aware of the available support processes, and how to access them.
- All Personal Tutors should ensure that they fully understand their role and should effectively communicate with their students and provide them with sufficient guidance and support to meet their individual needs.
- UCL Careers should offer a diverse range of career events, workshops, and networking sessions that cater to different fields and interests.
- The full range of Career and Personal Development opportunities should be clearly communicated to all students.



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Department and Learning Community

9% (N = 485/5136) of all SSCC comments related to Department and Learning Community. The three main sub-themes were Social and Community, Common and Study Areas, and Student Voice. Generally, academic representatives were satisfied with the feedback avenues available to them, but students were often left disheartened and frustrated due to a lack of follow-through action. There were also broader concerns regarding a lack of study and communal spaces across campus. Given that strong communities have been proven vital for the success of students fully engaging in their education, these issues should not be reduced to students 'just' wanting more space. If UCL is to fulfil its promise of offering students a world-leading educational experience, the importance of Department and Learning Community cannot be underestimated.

Social and Community

When looking at the SSCC minutes, comments relating to Social and Community accounted for almost half (N = 202/485) of all Department and Learning Community comments. Students were divided on this topic, with 50% of the data coded as negative. The value of Social and Community cannot be underestimated; they enrich students' university experience, contribute to the overall wellbeing and personal development of students, and are integral for success within university and beyond. The main areas of focus for students included departmental socials and events, as well as concerns regarding integration between groups.

Positively, feedback from the New to UCL 2022 survey found that 87% of taught students have been able to make social connections with peers in their department or programme. Events organised by students' programme, faculty, or department were considered particularly useful. This sentiment has also been echoed in the SSCC minutes, with some students commending the increase in department social events: "The Christmas get together went well and it was great to see everyone that came along."

However, there was also concern regarding the lack of integration between groups, with some worried that students are struggling to create community among themselves. This aligns with sector research from Wonkhe and Pearson, who found that certain demographics – specifically, those who are disabled, non-binary, gay, lesbian, or queer – have a lower sense of belonging in comparison to their peers.²⁸ For example, disabled students were less likely to feel that their opinions were valued, to feel a sense of community, or to feel that they have a support network on their course. UCL's 2022 NSS results support this, with disabled students significantly less likely to feel part of a learning community at UCL in comparison to their peers (59% vs 70%).²⁹

Feeling part of a learning community and feeling a strong sense of belonging has been found to correlate with academic success and motivation, higher self-belief, and leads to positive psychological

outcomes. Therefore, building strong communities within departments and across UCL is vital for the success of our students engaging in a well-rounded, world-leading educational experience.^{30,31,32}

To improve this within the UCL context, UCL's Student Life Strategy will play a significant role. Looking to the value of departmental societies within the UCL learning community, the Students' Union and University aim to "reimagine departmental societies as pioneering student-led hubs for extra- and co-curricular activities within every department at UCL, inspiring students and staff to come together, forming an intellectual partnership which transforms the student experience at a departmental level". To achieve this, it is vital that a new Students' Union building is prioritised for investment. This will provide a central hub of student life activity to complement local departmental community activities and space, ensure students have adequate access to space where they can study and socialise together, and ensure departmental societies have adequate facilities to run events and utilise necessary storage space. When looking to deepen students' sense of community, this will add immense value.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

"Students feel well supported, good student community and good feedback has been received about personal tutors."

"Students had enjoyed the social events but would appreciate more of these."

"Buddy system and cohort activity initiatives noted as useful for PT students to be able to meet fellow peers."

Common and Study Area

11% (N = 51/485) of the SSCC comments coded within Department and Learning Community related to Common and Study Areas. Common and Study Areas are valuable spaces for students. When done properly, these spaces have the potential to provide students with opportunities for focused work, collaboration, and social interaction, whilst also promoting a sense of community. However, students were generally dissatisfied with this area, with 73% of the data coded as negative. The main issue discussed within this sub-theme was the lack of space – both for studying and socialising – available to students.

Repeatedly, students expressed frustration at the lack of student study space across campus, with one student noting that "this is an example of a broader point of resources per capita (including desks, kitchen facilities, etc.) now that there are more research students in the department". As demonstrated here, suitable space for postgraduate research students was a recurring theme, with multiple meetings remarking that "space is a big issue for PhD students". With research from Wonkhe

and Pearson showing that there is a significant link between study space and a sense of community, it is unsurprising that dissatisfaction here intersects with concerns around Social and Community.³³

Similarly, students also felt frustrated at the lack of functional, communal spaces around campus: “It would be nice if [we] had a student room to mingle. Students have been sent out by security several times after teaching sessions. It is not pleasant and makes students feel not part of the faculty.” With research from RGSUs showing that students have reduced their socialising as a direct result of the cost of living crisis, it is understandable that students are frustrated at the lack of space available for them to socialise within their departments at no additional cost.³⁴ Once again, these frustrations demonstrate the urgent need for a new Students' Union UCL building where students can come together in group study spaces, build communities and feel ‘at home’ on campus.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“In the current academic year these rooms were being utilised for teaching and as such the cohort perceived that they had lost a place to study together.”

“Students stated that it is difficult to find a UCL study space to work in.”

“We need common space. I know this is an issue since we moved into the refurbished building years ago now. But we are physically detached from the main campus that has plenty of open shared spaces. We really do need it in this building. So that different programmes have space to meet each other.”

“[There is a] lack of information around study room availability and the functionality in the rooms including facilities and equipment and that the overall feel is that the rooms available are not for PhD students to study. [...] PhD students need more space.”

Student Voice

Almost a quarter of SSCC comments (N = 115/485) within Department and Learning Community concerned Student Voice. Ensuring opportunities for the Student Voice is vital; it empowers students to actively participate in shaping their educational experience, fostering a sense of ownership and continuous improvement across the university community. Again, students were divided on this topic. Whilst students were typically grateful that they could provide feedback via the designated avenues, many students felt that the feedback loop often failed to progress past gathering and analysing feedback.

Students were typically satisfied that they had the opportunity to provide feedback and felt that this was valuable for future cohorts: “the role of student reps are still important, and contribute to a

positive legacy, improving the programme for future cohorts.” This was echoed in the TEF student representative focus groups. Specifically, lead departmental and faculty representatives reflected that the SSCC process is effective for raising issues, and that they were happy with the opportunities to provide feedback on their course.

However, negative sentiment related to an ongoing frustration regarding the lack of follow-through: “[students] suggested that receiving feedback or answers to the issues raised in surveys would motivate individuals to participate. Many times, the questions raised are left unanswered.”

Another area of concern among student representatives was the lack of engagement among the wider student population, with attempts to engage their peers often yielding limited results: “she contacted her cohort for feedback, but nothing was received on this occasion”, “there were no survey responses”, “I did not receive any feedback from [my] cohort regarding the modules”. Again, this was echoed among the TEF student representative focus groups. Here, students felt that any potential impact of the student voice is let down by a lack of understanding from the wider student body regarding the role all students can play in shaping their academic experience.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students are pleased with the process of them giving continuous feedback.”

“Students would like to have a space to sit down and have chat to talk about what works and what doesn’t within the department as a whole.”

“Reps agreed that issues and suggestions raised by Reps were being actioned quickly, although they are not sure if the survey completion percentage rates of Students Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs) or Early Module Feedback Questionnaires (EMFQs) are high enough to really be useful.”

“[Student representative] noted that the SSCC is and has been very useful and she has felt able to share her feedback.”

Examples of Best Practice

- Have a clear and transparent feedback loop so that students can receive timely and effective responses to their feedback.
- Expand departmental social events and encourage students to be involved in the organisation of these events through departmental societies to ensure inclusivity and diversity.
- Provide clear and up-to-date information about the availability, functionality, and facilities in study and common room areas.



Organisation and Management

17% (N = 864/5136) of all SSCC comments related to Organisation and Management. The three main sub-themes were Communication, Programme Structure and Class Timetabling. Many students were satisfied with their Programme Structure – often praising them for being well-organised and enjoyable. However, there was widespread dissatisfaction with slow Communication and timetables clashes. These issues often left students feeling frustrated and confused. Given that many students are already balancing multiple, competing priorities, it is understandable that poor Communication and Class Timetabling issues are a cause of annoyance for students.

Communication

As in previous years, Communication featured prominently in the SSCC minutes, accounting for 27% (N = 234/864) of comments relating to Organisation and Management. Effective Communication should be highly valued; it promotes a supportive and connected university environment for students and offers opportunities for collaboration. It is also necessary for the basic exchange of vital information. Unfortunately, feedback in this area was predominantly negative (76%). Key areas of concern included the speed and clarity of Communication.

Across all faculties, students faced issues regarding Communication. Many students cited that communications from their department were often confusing, lacking, or inconsistent. For example, multiple students spoke about personal tutors letting emails go unanswered, and other students “complained about poor transparency and communication with faculty.” Elsewhere, students expressed frustration when communication channels were established and then ignored. For example: “Moodle questions appeared not to have been answered”, “Some tutors are not responding to questions posted on Moodle or sent via email.” These issues often left students feeling unvalued, confused, and stressed.

Many students also cited dissatisfaction with the speed of communications. Typically, this related to changes being communicated at short notice or simply never being communicated with at all. This often left students feeling disregarded, and also contributed towards further stress: “[I would like] more interaction between professors and students – sometimes professors didn’t reply to questions till weeks later.” Concerns around poor communication are not unique to UCL. Research by Advance HE and HEPI shows that when talking about poor organisation and administration, this was mainly due to communication issues between staff and students.³⁵ Research from Wonkhe and Pearson highlights the risk of not addressing Communication concerns, reporting that “when emails were left unanswered or responses were slow, students felt like they were not respected as full members of the community.”³⁶ To remedy this, they advocate that staff should “set expectations with students on arrival about when they should expect a response to communications.”

When students were positive about Communication, it was often because of consistently prompt, clear, and friendly communication. By providing students with quick responses, students felt supported to engage with their learning: “When students feel they want to learn more of one topic, they receive very quick responses with extra materials to read. This ensures that the quality of learning keeps improving.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“The students appreciate that their tutor always replies to their messages promptly.”

“Module leads have been very good at responding to feedback and questions as they arise.”

“There has been a lack of communication from the dissertations staff, resulting in students doing unnecessary work.”

“Poor communication and lack of feedback contributed significantly to student stress and anxiety.”

“Students complained about poor transparency and communication with faculty.”

Programme Structure

14% (N = 119/864) of the SSCC comments within Organisation and Management related to the Programme Structure. When done well, a Programme Structure provides students with clear pathways and a well-rounded educational experience that allows them to maximise their potential. Students were incredibly divided in this area (41% negative vs 29% positive). Students typically ranged from being pleased with their Programme Structure thanks to good organisation and inclusive practices, to feeling frustrated at the lack of cohesion and synergy between modules.

Many students appreciated how their courses were organised, believing that they were well-structured, clear, and inclusive: “Well-structured programme which [they] are finding relevant to [their] work. Role-plays are useful and, while slightly anxiety provoking, are directly transferrable to [their] caseloads in service.” This feedback often coincided with students feeling that the course was well organised, and that they therefore felt supported to succeed: “Students feel the course runs very smoothly and it is very well organised and accessible.”

When students were dissatisfied, it was often due to a perceived lack of cohesion, and frustrations about inadequate organisation. Many students discussed that their course often felt unstructured, with some students “complaining about a disorganised module structure in general.” Students also queried the intensity of their workload, with some feeling that programmes were overly compact or

poorly timed: “Some students found the MA programme very compact and wondered if it could be longer.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“The majority of students feel supported by the lecturers and programme structure and many students are engaged in the programme.”

“The cohort felt that parts/sections of the modules were disconnected.”

“While this course has been noted for its difficulty, it has also been noted for its well organised structure, with notes that complement the in-person lectures and online videos well; because of this, students are mostly positive about this module.”

“A few students commented about the timings of the modules and how there are too many modules in the same period.”

Class Timetabling

20% (N = 171/864) of SSCC comments coded within Organisation and Management concerned Class Timetabling. Effective Class Timetabling is invaluable; through minimising timetable conflicts and ensuring that all changes are well communicated, UCL could provide its students with a learning environment that reduces stress and enhances student productivity. Based on the SSCC minutes, however, this is not being achieved. Instead, student comments were overwhelmingly negative (92%) and mainly concerned timetable clashes and back-to-back lectures.

These issues featured prominently in faculty representative manifestos and student focus groups. In the TEF focus groups, students remarked that modules often clashed because the timetable was released too late to easily change module sections. Within the SSCC meetings, one student stated: “Students did not have their timetables finalised until week 2 so there was some confusion with resolving timetable clashes and joining modules late.” However, UCL students are not alone in their Class Timetabling frustrations; this is an issue that extends across the sector. Research carried out by Advance HE and HEPI found that many students felt the timetabling of their course had been poor, with timetable clashes being common across the sector.³⁷

For students whose commitments extended beyond their studies – whether that be due to work, caring responsibilities, or extra-curricular activities – last minute timetable changes and module clashes presented significant issues. Given that the cost of living crisis has left students increasingly dependent on work, with 17% (N = 464/2460) in paid employment for more than 30 hour per week, many students are not afforded the luxury of being able to drop everything when their class timetable is changed at short notice.³⁸ One student commented, “Some timetable changes had felt quite last-minute, which

had made things difficult for dovetailing with paid work”, and another said that “Students are quite annoyed at the last-minute timetable changes. Although it is understood that this is the first year of this new course, it is hard to manage around commitments such as work for some students, leaving them stressed with regards to how it is running.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Joint honours students complained about core modules timetable clashes.”

“The representatives stressed that the lateness in receiving timetables caused dismay among the students and would be better to have received this in good time so students could organise their studies better.”

“There were a few questions about timetable arrangements and last-minute changes. The Wednesday PM slot is unclear, and students don’t always know when/where they need to attend. Students who engage in sport/extra-curricular through the Student Union find there is often a clash with the Wednesday PM slots and they can’t attend.”

Examples of Best Practice

- To help alleviate student frustration and enhance transparency, set and communicate reasonable expectations for response times.
- Provide clear, regular updates on any changes or important information.
- Prioritise releasing timetables well in advance to allow students to make necessary adjustments and avoid clashes with other commitments such as work, caring responsibilities, or extracurricular activities.



Facilities

6% (N = 292/5136) of all SSCC comments related to Facilities. The three main sub-themes were UCL IT Platforms, Lecture Capture, and Teaching Rooms. Students generally felt negative about Facilities, with many of the frustrations captured in previous reports – such as issues with Lecture Capture – persisting. Another growing concern for students is Teaching Rooms. Given that there has been a significant return to in-person teaching in comparison to recent years, it is understandable that students are now homing in on the quality of Teaching Rooms.

UCL IT Platforms

18% (N = 52/292) of the SSCC comments coded within Facilities related to UCL IT Platforms. IT Platforms can facilitate seamless access to resources, enable effective communication, and provide online learning tools. Based on the SSCC minutes, students were divided in opinion when it came to UCL's IT Platforms, with 65% of the data coded as negative, and 21% coded positively.

Many students reported specific technical issues; these ranged from an inability to upload assessments to exams starting late. For example, multiple students noted issues with WISEflow, UCL's digital exam and assessment platform. One student noted that they “could not view their feedback and could not download the file on WISEflow to be able to get their tutor's feedback”, with another stating they could not upload their exam paper to WISEflow.

There were also concerns regarding Moodle, with 17 comments specifically mentioning that the platform is difficult to navigate. When considering what might improve this, students suggested tutorials on how to use the platform would be beneficial. Given that 1 in 4 first year students do not know where to go for IT support, departments being proactive in this area may lead to increased satisfaction and an improved educational experience.⁴⁰

Encouragingly, students who “now understand how [Moodle] works” felt that it was efficient, as well as successfully utilised by the module lead(s). Specifically, students valued being able to see their deadlines in one place, finding that “This made it easier for [them] to manage their workloads.” Students also appreciated being able to easily access marking criteria, their student handbook, and resources.

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“For international students it is assumed they will be aware of Moodle but maybe some tutorials around that may be useful for them.”

“Mixed reviews were received over the usability of Moodle with some students finding it hard to navigate but others finding it very easy to use.”

“[One student] reported issues with accessing lecture slides on Moodle, with video content going down and not working.”

Lecture Capture

18% (N = 53/292) of the SSCC comments coded within Facilities related to Lecture Capture. When used effectively, Lecture Capture has the ability to provide flexible and accessible learning opportunities, allowing students to review and reinforce their understanding of course materials, maximise engagement, and accommodate different learning styles. However, SSCC minutes show that students were generally dissatisfied with Lecture Capture, with 78% of the data coded as negative. The main issues with Lecture Capture included poor audio quality, unreliable captions, lecture recordings being uploaded late, and dissatisfaction with teaching staff who choose not to use the system.

With regards to recordings not being made available on Lecturecast, students expressed concern that this was negatively impacting students who miss lectures due to circumstances outside of their control (e.g., poor health, religion, caring responsibilities): “The timetable does not accommodate religious days and asked for recorded lectures for religious students.” Another student advocated for the value of lecture capture software for students who have English as a second language (ESL): “Students would like more lectures to be recorded especially with ESL students in mind.”

Frustratingly for students, even when Lecturecast is used, technical issues were repeatedly raised. One student felt that this was due to a lack of “know-how” among teaching staff and suggested that “technical support and refresher training may be beneficial for staff.” Given students reported that Lecturecast recordings are useful for reviewing teaching material, as well as invaluable for students who are unable to join lectures live, supporting staff in this area would be valuable. Importantly, student desire for lecture recordings is not unique to UCL students. Rather, research shows that online recordings are now expected by half of all students and accessed by 79% of students.⁴¹

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students would prefer if lectures were recorded, which would enable them to review the information at a later stage.”

“Concerns over some lecture quality, audio quality and logic in some didn’t quite make sense.”

“Lecturecast recordings stop and cut off if lecturers run over time, some important points were missed because recordings ended.”

“Students have fed back that Lecturecast recordings have been helpful and useful in reviewing teaching material.”

Teaching Rooms

24% (N = 53/292) of the SSCC comments coded within Facilities related to Teaching Rooms. Students were generally dissatisfied with Teaching Rooms, with 85% of the data coded as negative. Given the important role that Teaching Rooms play in fostering an optimal learning environment and enabling interactive and engaging learning, it is understandably frustrating for many students that this does not align with their experience.

Problems included the location of rooms, layout of rooms, audio-visual equipment, and seating. For example, one student spoke about teaching rooms being different each week, remarking that this “often causes confusion”, with another student remarking that “the learning space is not very good – students can’t hear if they’re sitting far away.” Unfortunately, issues with teaching rooms were widespread across all faculties.

When students were positive, this related to issues being effectively resolved between meetings: “Students are very happy with the change of room for both modules”, “Good room allocations since [the] last meeting.”

In the SSCC meetings, students told us:

“Students complained about insufficient classrooms.”

“Students complained about lecture room locations being far apart [and] lecture room allocation.”

“Classes are often located a long distance from one another, causing disruption to teaching.”

“Students have raised issues about their space not having adequate lighting and poor ventilation.”

Examples of Best Practice

- Provide tutorials or training sessions to familiarise students with platforms such as Moodle, ensuring they can navigate and utilise them effectively.
- Educate staff on the benefits of Lecturecast and offer refresher training for teaching staff to ensure that they can use the platform.
- Ensure that teaching rooms have the appropriate audio-visual equipment, layout, and seating arrangements for students to be able fully participate in their learning.



Recommendations

Assessment and Feedback

As in previous reports, the issue of Assessment and Feedback has once again been a pertinent topic for students. From issues with the timing of assessments, to dissatisfaction with assessment bunching, to feeling inadequately prepared, students have provided a wide range of feedback in this area. Through taking appropriate steps to tackle these areas of student concern, UCL can help to reduce student stress, and improve student outcomes.

Given that Assessment and Feedback are integral to the student experience, the report makes the following recommendations to UCL for improving this area:

- a. Whilst waiting for the new Curriculum Management (CM) software, staff should be encouraged to use the CHART tool across UCL. As discussed last year, this should include asking departments to consider the timing of assessments when using the tool.
- b. To support students to navigate new assessment styles with confidence, departments should provide clarity on assessment formats through offering students access to past or model examples of assessments. Departments should also offer students the opportunity to practice assessment where appropriate.
- c. Again, when re-designing and reviewing learning outcomes for modules, departments should ensure that assessment criteria is aligned to Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) guidelines, and that programme teams are discussing these criteria with students in a contextualised manner.

Department and Learning Community

It is clear that many students are seeking a stronger sense of Department and Learning Community. The feedback calls for actions that range from amplifying the student voice and promoting inclusivity, to addressing the shortage of study spaces and creating transparent feedback loops. Through addressing these concerns, UCL can lay the foundation for stronger communities at both departmental and institutional levels, leading to an enriched educational experience for all students.

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

- a. Departments should assess their feedback loops to ensure that, when necessary, the student voice is empowered to bring about tangible change.

- b. UCL should work with Students' Union UCL and the student body to ensure that existing Departmental Societies are well resourced and supported, and that new Departmental Societies can be built where they do not yet exist.
- c. UCL and Students' Union should work together to run an information campaign aimed at educating all students about the Faculty and Lead Departmental Representative roles as part of the Academic Reps system, and the value we jointly hold in amplifying the student voice.
- d. UCL should urgently consider investment in new informal study spaces and student social spaces as part of the development of a new Students' Union building to provide a central space on the Bloomsbury campus that students can use to help form a stronger community and sense of belonging at UCL.

Learning Resources

Based on the feedback provided from SSCC minutes, it is clear that students have significant concerns regarding the quality, availability, and accessibility of the Learning Resources provided. As discussed, Learning Resources play a vital role in supporting students' academic performance and improving their learner outcomes. Given that this area has seen an alarming increase in negative sentiment, there is a pressing need for actionable recommendations in this area.

As a result of this feedback, the report makes the following recommendations:

- a. To ensure they can effectively utilise Lecturecast and resolve technical issues promptly, staff should be reminded of the technical support and training guides available and offered refresher training where necessary.
- b. Teaching staff should be reminded of the support, guidance, and resources available to them for providing effective Learning Resources, to help ensure that students receive the resources necessary. Steps should also be taken to monitor whether this guidance is being effectively implemented.

Communication

Effective Communication is essential for creating a supported and connected learning community for students. However, analysis of the SSCC minutes shows that there is a pressing need to address poor communication practices, and to alleviate a sense of being undervalued among students. By taking proactive measures to improve Communication, UCL can build a connected learning community which allows students to fully engage in their academic experience.

Based on the feedback received, the report makes the following recommendations to UCL for improving this area:

- a. Address the widespread dissatisfaction with slow communication by implementing strategies to enhance the speed and clarity of communication. These strategies would ensure emails and inquiries from students are promptly answered, and would establish clear channels of communication between faculty, personal tutors, and students.
- b. Continue communicating the value of Lecturecast in supporting student learning to staff across UCL.
- c. Continue advocating for closer coordination between programme and module leaders to enable consistent communications to students in their individual cohort.



Footnotes

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- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Students' Union UCL (2023). Teaching Excellence Framework: Our Submission. Students' Union UCL Blog. Retrieved from <https://studentsunionucl.org/blog/hamza-ahmed/teaching-excellence-framework-our-submission>
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¹⁶ Ibid.

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