

# **Student Priorities for Education Report**

**Trends in Student Feedback**



**Summer 2019**

[studentsunionucl.org/make-change](https://studentsunionucl.org/make-change)



# Student Priorities for Education 2019

## About this report

Building on the work of our 2017 and 2018 reports, our annual report on trends in student feedback now draws on information from two sources – both our analysis of feedback from Staff Student Consultative Committees (SSCCs), and the Union’s new ‘Tell UCL’ activity, a week of in-person campus presence through which we prompted students to name the most positive and negative elements of their overall experience as a student.

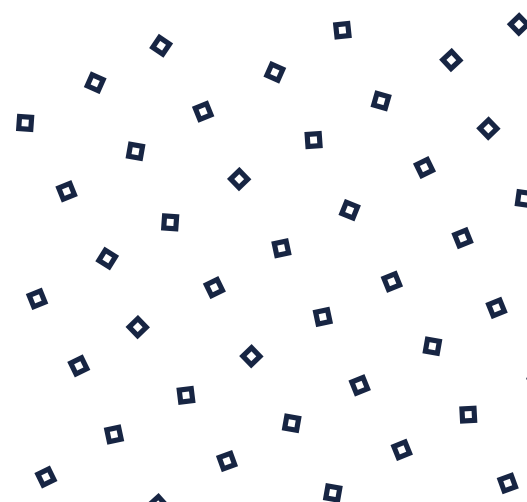
Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, what students chose to highlight in these two different contexts varied significantly.

For both exercises, we have continued to build on our qualitative coding system, which we continue to adapt and update to handle a broader range of topics. We categorise student comments which relate to a particular aspect of students’ experiences, and note whether students have expressed these negatively, neutrally, or positively.

For this report, we have delved deeper into the areas commented on most frequently, most negatively, and most positively. We have focussed on what students have indicated are their highest priorities, and put forward recommendations for action based on a review of individual students’ comments in these areas.

We are already working closely with the Office of the Vice Provost (Education & Student Affairs), and with the Doctoral School, to jointly develop and utilise our qualitative coding system. By next year’s report, we should be able to offer an overview of not just SSCC feedback and our own data gathering, but student comments in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and National Student Survey (NSS) as well.

Students provide an enormous amount of feedback to UCL and the Union, formally and informally, and yet sometimes UCL as a whole can be eager to push for more feedback still. For students, repetitious requests for feedback can help exacerbate a sense that nothing is being done. This report is not just about representing students’ feedback, but digging into it, understanding it, *listening* to it, and hopefully, taking action on it. Critically, taking actions on the next steps will only work if students are invited in, and asked not just to provide feedback, but to be involved in co-designing what the future should look like.



## Overview

There is overlap and difference between what our SSCC analysis highlighted as students' most positive feedback in 2017-18 and this year. As ever, students are typically most positive about the content of their programmes and modules, a consistent thread found in our analysis over several years.

Transition & Induction and Social & Community are also areas that were highlighted in last year's report. In some cases, there is a degree of overlap between comments from students in these areas, indicating the high level of importance students place on the intangible and tough to manufacture sense of belonging to a cohort and community on campus.

Student Voice is a newcomer to this year's SSCC analysis. It is obviously pleasing that students involved in their SSCCs feel that these are worthwhile, and highlight instances where students felt listened to, and where it was clear that action had been taken in response. The most effective SSCCs dissolve boundaries between students and staff, and create advocates amongst the student body for the hard work staff put in behind the scenes.



## SSCC Trends

### Positives

#### Programme & Module Content

Programme & Module content received the highest number of positive comments by a significant distance. Whilst this is partly a function of specific prompting at some SSCCs, lots of discussion at SSCCs rightly focuses on this area even unprompted.

Positive comments sometimes slightly vague, related to general enjoyment of the course and references to overall positive feedback. Diversity was often praised in this context, referring to diversity in the course readings, teaching staff and student population. When looking at the negative comments we can see that there is often frustration in content repetition and overlap; a lack of training for practical work; and a heavy workload. Therefore we might infer that vague but positive comments relate to courses where these problems don't arise.

#### Students told us:

- » “Students appreciated the range of lectures with experts in their own field.”
- » “Students in the third year are generally happy about their modules with their interesting range of topics and excellent organisation by their tutors.”
- » “Trainees fed back that they found the seminars the most helpful and would advocate scheduling more of these during the year. Diversity seminars and lectures were generally very helpful.”
- » “The module is the one that the students are most happy with. Students appreciate that the curriculum is diverse and the syllabus/lectures go beyond western figures.”
- » “Students have enjoyed that the lectures are from a range of academics from different research areas.”
- » “Students appreciate the diverse nature of the lectures and the student base.”

#### Points of good practice:

- » A diverse and socially conscious curricula is highly valued by students and programme leads should strive to include a representative range of people in reading lists.
- » Good organisation is key and can be achieved through well-structured seminars that clearly contribute to a wider module-structure.
- » Repetition is a frustrating quality for students and so it is best when module content is varied, diverse and does not repeat content between module weeks or years.

## Student Voice

Students are generally happy with the SSCC process and feel their voices are being heard and acted upon by staff once an issue has been raised. There was a fair amount of discussion around how to improve student engagement in Student Evaluation Questionnaires (SEQs), PTES, and other surveys, with students giving recommendations on the best format to conduct these through.

### Students told us:

- » “The [rep] training on how to behave in a meeting was useful.”
- » “Students were generally happy with the response to their feedback and how the staff acted on it.”
- » “Students are very satisfied with the course; they have received very good support and their feedback was acted upon effectively.”
- » “Student representatives reported that the new system of speaking to year head is working well. The SSCC seems effective in reporting and resolving issues students encounter.”
- » “The third year representative noted that the low response rate to the NSS is not representation of how the student’s feel about the department.”
- » “Student representatives felt that the timing of the PTES survey could be improved, since it coincided with a period of busy workload on the programme when students were feeling under pressure, which may have negatively affected survey results.”

### Points of good practice:

- » Ensuring that academic rep training is interactive, participatory and engaging is important for preparing students for their role. Specific training for undergraduate students, such as how to behave in a meeting, can be particularly useful. For postgraduate students, training could also be provided online in case of inconvenient scheduling.
- » Supporting students in contacting the rest of the cohort is imperative to gathering SSCC feedback as often student reps have no way of communicating with the entire group. Ways in which this can be achieved is through setting aside time in the core lecture or seminar at the beginning and end of term to facilitate this.
- » ‘Survey fatigue’ is a challenge to overcome because there are various causes, e.g. because students felt they had already filled in many surveys; because there is little direct contact between staff and students in Term 3; because they come at a bad time with other deadlines; and because some students were concerned that their contributions were either not really anonymous or might be used in staff evaluation against lecturers. However, ensuring that surveys are concise, easy to use and using limited and simple questions is recommended.

## Transition & Induction

Positive comments were reported for induction and transition across undergraduate, masters, and research SSCCs. Several comments overlapped with Social & Community, indicating the importance students place on the provision of opportunities for cohorts to get to know each other and other cohorts as well.

### Students told us:

- » “The Lead Department Rep reported that students had felt welcomed and informed during induction week and that they felt it was a good opportunity to meet staff as well as PhD students, especially for those students who are already considering applying for a PhD.”
- » “1st year reps reported that there had been very good feedback about the trip in Induction week. Students felt it was a good opportunity before starting the course to form friendships”
- » “Students enjoyed Induction Week welcome social event.”
- » “It was reported that first year BA students were satisfied with the transition process and pleased with the resources.”
- » “The module is encouraging and bridging the gaps from A levels.”

### Points of good practice:

- » Peer induction and transition mentors were commented on as useful and appreciated by undergraduate, masters and PhD students. These should be introduced as early on as the induction period or before in order to give students time to meet with them regularly and make the most of the relationship.
- » A good community feel is often a feature of departments where the discipline requires fieldwork. Other disciplines can achieve this by promoting and providing opportunities for students to get to know each other and staff through free and informal off-campus activities that make use of UCL’s location in proximity to London’s wealth of landmarks and cultural events. This would be especially beneficial during induction week.
- » Communicating thoroughly about which modules can be studied and what is to be expected between years is always appreciated, especially for first year students.



## Social & Community

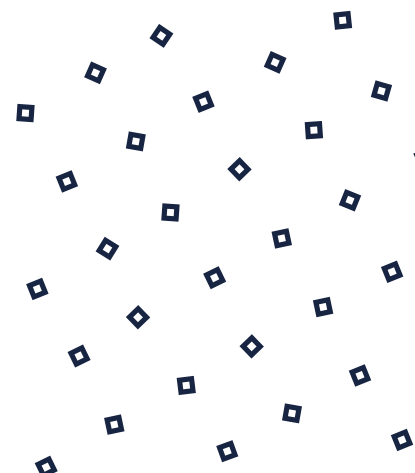
This year positive feedback about trips such as away days, residentials and day trips, featured prominently as something students really valued. Students enjoyed the social events on offer and were proactive in suggesting/requesting more, such as coffee mornings and quizzes, as opportunities for cohort-bonding. Opportunities to informally share ideas and develop skills were also appreciated.

### Students told us:

- » “Students gave positive feedback on the Cumberland Lodge trip. It brought the cohort close together.”
- » “BSc 2nd Year Reps proposed the idea of a weekend residential research symposium (~away day) as a networking event between students and staff.”
- » “Journal Pub, a monthly student-led activity, Journal club in the pub with the aim of building critical appraisal skills in an informal setting. This activity receives a good turnout and is happening consistently.”
- » “It was reported that recent HOA Society events had included a picnic which had been a great success, and a trip to the British Museum to see the Rodin exhibition. A History of Art Gala had been arranged for this evening (7 June) and had been very popular, with 85 students expected to attend.”

### Points of good practice:

- » A sense of belonging is an important part of the student experience and attempts should be made to foster it on the programme, department, and faculty level. There tends to be sufficient opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to a programme cohort, but more could be done to help develop department and faculty cohort belonging.
- » Trips, visits and residentials are an excellent way of facilitating meaningful connection between students. From exhibition visits, to field trips in other areas of London to weekend retreats like Cumberland Lodge, opportunities to socialise beyond campus are valued.
- » Opportunities for postgraduate research students to meet each other across disciplines and the university were appreciated.





## Careers & Personal Development

Many students commented that UCL Careers is being used and found useful, especially when they are directed to opportunities by their department. Departmental careers events, such as talks and drop-ins, are also popular. An even spread of information on academic and non-academic careers is appreciated.

### Students told us:

- » “Course Reps confirmed that their peers were using UCL Careers, e.g. for mock interviews, and peers were sharing experience and knowledge about e.g. application and interviews.”
- » “Students feel very supported with their internship searches with drop-ins and briefings available.”
- » “The careers talks were well attended, as well as the Employers evening.”
- » “Students have received lots of advice regarding academia, but most students want to go into industry instead.”

### Points of good practice:

- » Students appreciate frequent and relevant information on careers sent to them by their department, including advice and opportunities for both long-term career prospects and part-time jobs.
- » As well as information on opportunities and advice sent via email, students appreciate departmental events such as internship support drop-in sessions and briefings, employers evenings, careers talks and skills workshops.
- » Paying equal attention to careers in academia and industry in advice to students across all levels is necessary to appeal to everyone. Sometimes these can be disproportionately geared towards academic careers.

## Negatives

### Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Whilst diversity was referred to positively in other sections, such as Programme & Module Content, there were no positive comments specifically related to issues relevant to Equality & Liberation, disabled access, international or part-time students. The most notable negative comments were about part-time students feeling left out, lacking in relevant information or the course structure not meeting their needs. Many comments were also raised regarding a lack of support for international students in adapting to a new system, as well as concerns about course content being difficult for people whose first language is not English. We also saw some comments expressing frustration about the monitoring of those on Tier 4 visas. Concerns were also expressed about students, staff and guests with access needs not being able to participate fully in academic activities.

#### Students told us:

- » “Students reported that they sometimes feel lonely, especially if they are Part Time or international. It was suggested that more events that are informal could help resolve this issue.”
- » “Some of the part-time students are not finding the seminars this term very helpful, mostly because they tend to be geared towards Empirical Projects, which they may not be taking this year and the dissertation.”
- » “Part-time and full-time students both experienced difficulty obtaining relevant information if on a non-standard PhD.”
- » “Part-time students reported finding changes to class timetables difficult to fit in around work.”
- » “Part-time students felt they are not given enough time to choose their projects.”
- » “LT1 is inaccessible for wheelchair users. It’s unacceptable for patients who attend lectures to aid in the students education to have to struggle to access LT1 as accessibility is poor and UCL does nothing to support them.”
- » “There were comments that some students who were not from a background in the discipline, particularly international students, had reported feeling a less smooth transition.”
- » “International trainees are not eligible for claiming back travel expenses, like their home-fee colleagues.”
- » “Students that faced accessibility issues (for a variety of reasons) and were unable to physically attend the university every day felt marginalised, and aligned themselves with the concerns of online students. These students paid the same fees as “face-to-face” students but did not have full access to all seminars, lectures and training.”
- » “A query was raised about a letter published in an national newspaper with a department member among its signatories which did not express support for trans people.”
- » “There is a perceived general lack of clarity over student entitlement to supervisory support for modules and dissertations (in terms of hours available to someone... With special regard to the needs of international students, explanation on this issue needs to be considerably clearer.”
- » “Student reported that several students (especially international students) were suffering from a lack of support, personal contact with staff and feelings of isolation.”
- » “Tier 4 - Recent changes to the monitoring of students on Tier 4 Visas had caused much student and supervisor dissatisfaction. The University’s re-interpretation of home office regulations was thought to be overly stringent and an IOE working group had formed to review Tier 4 Engagement Monitoring for the next academic year.”

### Points for improvement

- » Paying close attention to the specific needs of part-time students, being aware of how they might differ to those of full-time students and accommodating for those needs is important for ensuring the equal treatment of all students.
- » One way to improve the experience of part-time students is to give them ample notice about things they are required to do, such as submissions and attendance, or more flexibility around these requirements.
- » Support should be provided specifically geared towards international students in adapting to a new academic system. Providing clear and timely information on processes and expectations is important in supporting international students to use their time effectively, achieve academic success and feel included.
- » Beyond just the provision of information, students expect to feel supported through personal contact time with staff inside and outside of class times. This is especially important for making students with extra needs (e.g. language barriers or access barriers) feel included and equal to their peers.



## Teaching Delivery

There were a high number of positive and negative comments about teaching delivery, indicating that unsurprisingly, it is one of the most important issues to students. Enthusiasm and engagement of teaching staff is consistently praised and can make a big difference to overall enjoyment of modules.

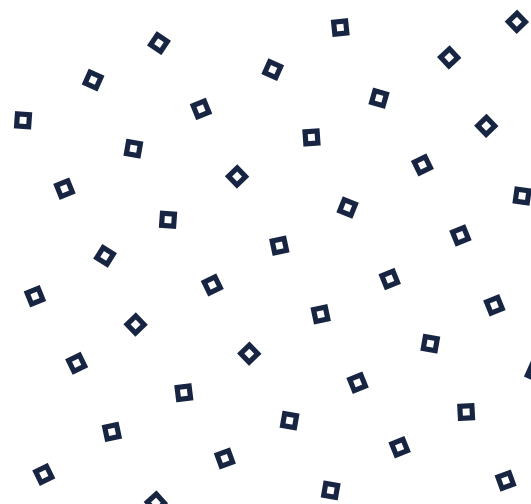
Much like Programme & Module Content, consistency, clarity and good organisation in teaching delivery is highly valued. Students want a coordinated approach across teaching staff as often conflicting information is shared and differing styles leads to confusion. Time management of teaching staff was commented on a lot, such as running over the class time or rushing to cover too much content. Also noted was a need for protocols around giving students breaks. The use of Moodle was also an issue of concern, with too much information being given before the lecture/seminar and making the class time repetitive, or not enough information being uploaded, which makes it hard to come prepared to class.

### **Students told us:**

- » “Students think that the course content is not easy to follow and due to the fast-paced lectures it is also difficult for them to focus on the content, take notes and understand.”
- » “The same amount of time is dedicated on each topic regardless of its level of difficulty. Students hope that more time will be spent on difficult topics.”
- » “Information is already published on Moodle so some feel the class is not very informative or necessary.”
- » “Students think that too many questions are discussed in the seminar and too many explanations are given which makes it difficult for them to think about the explanations as there is not enough time”
- » “Students reported a need for breaks between some of the lecture content, particularly heavy content where a lot of information was being taught by guest lecturers”
- » “Seminar leaders do not have a coordinated approach to homework”
- » “First-year students reported a disparity in the speed material was covered in different Middle English group, and were concerned that seminar leaders may not catch up in time to cover the next term’s material.”
- » “Students across the years said that a lot of the slides were lengthy, and that a lot of the lecturers rush through them as a result”
- » “The Reps reported differences in the way that the Tutorial Groups are facilitated, with varying levels of focus on the assignment, leading to problems of consistency”
- » “Some issues with time management of individual lectures were reported, with some lecturers going over time, or not uploading their slides or video tutorials onto Moodle in a timely manner.”
- » “Positive feedback was received at the inclusion of group work and confirmed the first session worked well. During subsequent sessions, however, not all students remained for the duration of the class. It was agreed the inclusion of group work was a good initiative but should be developed further. In practice, there had been different levels of contribution and participation. Group work had been difficult when students missed sessions.”

**Points for improvement:**

- » Group work in seminars is often commented on as being enjoyed by students, as long as the activity is clear and well-structured by teaching staff. Ensuring that contribution and participation is equal and consistent between students is a challenge that needs to be considered by staff. Some students suggested considering dividing groups by IELTS level or individual interests as a way of improving this.
- » Similarly, students enjoy interactive and discussion-based seminars but this needs to be well led and facilitated by teaching staff to be successful.
- » Teaching staff must endeavour to be familiar with the teaching room facilities, such as microphones, and the learning resources, such as presentation slides, before the lecture/seminar to ensure time efficiency and student satisfaction.
- » It was repeatedly raised by students that staff were not giving them breaks in seminars or lectures. This problem most commonly arose across the Faculties of Brain, Life and Medical Sciences.
- » Consistency and pace is key for students, in order for them to be able to keep up and understand the content being covered. Repetition across module content, learning resources and between different teaching staff should be avoided.



## Common & Study Areas

This section relates to department common rooms and study areas. Comments were predominantly related to a lack of good quality and suitable space for both studying and socialising, both because they are usually full and because of a lack of appropriate facilities. Many commented on the lack of availability of desks, especially those that are suitable for laptops, as well as seating. It was also noted that there was a lack of awareness amongst students about alternatives, such as UCL-wide study spaces and common areas.

A number of comments related to dissatisfaction from research students who did not feel they had suitable working space, which is an issue that is regularly raised with the Union by research students from right across UCL. Also, there were a few comments about student dissatisfaction with the lack of access to dedicated common areas they could identify with, especially students on interdisciplinary courses and research students.

### Students told us:

- » “Students repeated requests that have been made by students for the past 3 years about accessing the common room. Requests have been repeatedly denied by the faculty.”
- » “Students felt dissatisfied by lack of communal areas.”
- » “The students emphasised the need, not only for desk space but for a collaborative working space.”
- » “Students felt the existing hot desk policy was problematic and agreed that there should be an increase in the number of desks available specifically for PGR students.”
- » “Students requested more information about extra study spaces around College.”
- » “The other issues included having a student common room allocated specifically to students. The Director noted that this will not be a possibility.”
- » “Students complained about the lack of space and its poor quality available to them with so many others in a nicely refurbished space around them.”
- » “Students reported that the microwave oven in the kitchen is messy”
- » “The Committee heard a suggestion that more academic journals could be displayed in the Undergraduate Common Room.”
- » “There had been several occasions this term whereby groups of undergraduate students were using rooms for dancing and playing loud music. This proved disruptive to PGR students studying and to events scheduled in adjoining rooms.”
- » “Undergraduate students continue to use the PhD Hub”

### Points for improvement:

- » As improvements are made to some UCL buildings, others feel dissatisfied with those that are not well maintained. This could be improved by providing better facilities, as well as additional comforts like printed journals, vending machines, clean microwaves and appropriate desks and seating.
- » Where possible, specific spaces for different groups of students should be provided. From frustration around undergraduate students using research student spaces to certain departments not having access to a common room, students increasingly value a space to call their own, especially as the campus remains largely crowded.

- » Hot-desking seems to be an inadequate policy and a better long-term solution to a lack of desk space needs to be found, which is a major problem causing dissatisfaction and tensions between students.

## Assessment Preparation

This category is dominated by comments about students feeling confused by assessment instructions and unprepared for completing the assignment. This commonly occurs because of topics arising in assignments had not been well covered during class time; a lack of adequate training in how to complete new assessment styles; conflicting information being given out by different members of staff; direct instructions by teachers conflicting with assessment criteria; and past papers not reflecting current assignments.

### Students told us:

- » “Students raised concerns about the variations in verbal guidance that were given around assessment. They felt their questions were not always clearly responded to.”
- » “Students also felt that the past papers and essay samples were incomplete or not representative of the requirements expected.” Apparently one lecturer stressed the importance of their topic and that it would be in the exam, but it was not.”
- » “Exam questions did not reflect what students had been taught, and felt that the paper did not offer a fair reflection of their learning.”
- » “Students have requested clearer guidelines on assessments and feedback, clarifying marking guidelines for grades and borderlines for 2018/19.”
- » “Issues have been brought forward regarding varied availability of Mock exams. Some areas are offering them whilst others do not.”
- » “AS brought up the module, saying that it’s a disorganised module. One student in particular provided evidence of last-minute, conflicting information about assignment requirements that affected the assignment submitted.”
- » “Students are unsure of how to write an essay [in this style] and the module leader won’t let them look at past papers.”

### Points for improvement:

- » Modules should be planned with the assignment in mind so that students feel confident in their understanding of how the content relates to the assignment at every stage.
- » Students should receive guidance on how to prepare for all assignments. This can be provided through information sessions, past papers, revision sessions and formative essays. Crucially, provision of this should be consistent across cohorts/groups and not dependent on the member of staff.
- » Exams as an assignment style were particularly contentious, with many students raising concerns about feeling unprepared by their seminars/lectures. It was suggested that explicit exam preparation/revision skills could be covered during class to improve this.
- » Assessment criteria must be clearly communicated and remain consistent between written and verbal instructions.

## Module Allocation

Students were notably dissatisfied by not having enough information in enough time to make an informed choice about which modules to choose, and then finding that module information does not match up to the actual course once enrolled. Included in this issue was prerequisites for modules not being listed before sign up, resulting in module rejections occurring late and therefore making it difficult for students to choose another module as they have already filled up. The perceived inability to change modules in the second term is another cause for concern.

### Students told us:

- » “The lack of ability to change modules is a problem since some modules have descriptions online or on Portico that are not representative of the actual course.”
- » “The inflexibility to amend modules at the start of term 2 was raised as issue of concern. The committee agreed that this an ongoing university wide issue.”
- » “UG students reported the lack of information or in some cases the wrong information being given. They felt their option choices were significantly hampered due to missing or incorrect information on the website and in general, lack of communication.”
- » “There were a number of module rejections at the start of term, but because these were done late students had trouble finding other modules to take. This was also particularly an issue for affiliate students who arrive late.”
- » “Student Rep reported that handbooks are being circulated to students too late, resulting in students having only two days to finalise their optional module choices.”
- » “They also reported big issues with modules being filled too quickly.”
- » “Affiliate students were unhappy with the module selection process this year, because of limited module choices, lack of timetable information, overlapping content with home institution, students being rejected from modules without explanation and students not clear about prerequisites or level of modules.”
- » “Students reported that the Module clashes with joint programmes between the different departments were an ongoing issue.”
- » “Course descriptions for these modules make the module seem more technical than it actually is.”

### Points for improvement:

- » Information should be consolidated into the UCL wide Online Module Catalogue to ensure it is all kept up to date and students have a single reference point to ensure they can make informed decisions.
- » This information should be detailed and accurate, ensuring key information like prerequisites for taking the module and who the module lead will be is listed.
- » If module rejections must be made, these should be communicated at the absolute earliest, ideally before other modules have been filled up. It should always be communicated why a student has been rejected.



## Teaching Rooms & Class Sizes

Negative feedback about teaching rooms continues to be a significant issue and has been raised in the last three years of this report, it continues to remain relevant to current students. Many comments were raised about heating and lighting issues; frequent technical problems; poor quality or broken facilities, such as tables; and inappropriate allocation of rooms, e.g. the Royal National Hotel, the Venue and Drama Studios at the Institute of Education. This section has been combined with class sizes in order to reflect the large number of comments that related to inadequate teaching rooms due to large class sizes.

Whilst class sizes are seen as relative (e.g. students in English felt 20 students is too large whilst Statistical Science students said 100 students in one seminar was too large), the feeling of a class being too large seems to arise when interaction between staff and students is affected. When there are too many students to fit comfortably in the room, this issue often gets raised as an issue about the room.

### **Students told us:**

- » “MSc students reported that there is a perception amongst students that there has been an expansion of numbers on the masters programmes and that the interaction between staff and themselves feels less personable”
- » “Students reported that the seminars divide students into two groups but this means there are 100 students in each seminar group. Students explained that they don’t get the chance to ask any questions or have contact with the seminar tutor.”
- » “The tutorials are reportedly too full.”
- » “Students expressed that long days that lasted from 9AM to 7PM were tiring and had minimal breaks in between” “Locations such as the Royal National Hotel and the Drama Studio IOE are not appropriate rooms for lectures and every year these concerns are raised at the SSCC.”
- » “A student noted that in some lectures in the Royal National Hotel there is no audio, lecture cast or visual aids available.”
- » “The space booked for lectures is too small, which students see as a potential fire hazard.”
- » “Students relayed that the teaching lab is old fashioned and has limited resources.”
- » “Students were concerned about teaching in rooms too small to accommodate the size of the teaching group. As many rooms are based on last year’s student numbers, there can be some variances once students enrol.”
- » “Students complained that the lecture room (Roberts Building) is extremely hot and uncomfortable.”
- » “The room assigned to this module is too small, more space is needed as there are a lot of students on the course.”
- » “Central timetabling on occasions have allocated rooms which are smaller than the capacity of the module, and often don’t have air-conditioning or proper heating.”
- » “Students reported that the seminars divide students into two groups but this means there are 100 students in each seminar group. Students explained that they don’t get the chance to ask any questions or have contact with the seminar tutor.”
- » “The lectures that take place in the Jeffery Hall don’t have desks for the Students to take notes complete their tutorial exercises.”

**Points for improvement:**

- » As noted in last year's report, it remains difficult to note points that can be taken on board locally due to this issue largely lying centrally.
- » Every effort should be made by lecturers and departmental staff to ensure rooms are appropriate for the seminars/lectures they will be running and not rely on students raising it as an issue or complaint when the classes have started.
- » Students appreciate when problems, such as technical faults and heating/lighting issues, are able to be resolved quickly.



# Tell UCL

## Positives

Positive comments from students were much vaguer than negative comments, with students commenting more about general themes rather than specific issues. It is worth noting that Tell UCL produced different results to the SSCC, likely because of the format in which the data was gathered, which was far more informal, written on paper rather than conveyed verbally and collected by student staff rather than department staff in public settings. As such, comments related to students' experiences as a member of UCL more so than their identity as a member of their department.

## Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

This was predominantly about the diversity of the student body, with many references to students enjoying the multiculturalism, diversity and internationalism that the student body represents, and valuing the opportunity to socialise and learn with different people, different cultures and different mind-sets.

In response to the question 'What's the best thing about UCL?', students told us:

- » "Diversity. There are people from all over the world and we can learn about different cultures."
- » "The best thing is that UCL is truly global. All the diversity among people and culture. From more academic point of view I consider lecturers the best part of UCL - their enthusiasm and passion for what they're doing."
- » "The people, very diverse and international."
- » "Cultural diversity. It's great to meet people from all over the world; Amazing library facilities."
- » "Vibrant environment with students from different cultures and backgrounds."
- » "The connectivity and inclusiveness: on the basis of identity, I do not believe anyone feels significantly left out or marginalised."

## Location

Comments about the benefits of UCL's location, specifically in regards to its proximity to other London landmarks and facilities came up a lot so we created a new category to recognise it. Location was often noted as one of the best things about UCL in the same comment as a reference about UCL's prestigious reputation and ranking, as well as the people and diversity.

In response to the question 'What's the best thing about UCL?', students told us:

- » "The location, the world class degree, the people."
- » "Situated in Central London; Great research opportunities and ranking."
- » "An international college in central London - Best location! Close to British Museum - my favourite museum. Tutors are nice and friendly."
- » "Great location, world class experts, global student body, embedded in the practical aspects of the subject (e.g. access to think tanks, expert speakers etc.)"
- » "London, location, prestige."
- » "Location (i.e. proximity to tube stations and central London.)"
- » "Multicultural community with quality staff in a big city."

## Social & Community

This was the most highly commented upon category. These comments range from vague references to 'the people' to the approachability and friendliness of students and staff. Also comments about the range of co-curricular activities that are available, such as student societies, events and general opportunities for socialising. In terms of the negative comments, there was a broader range of more specific comments, with a few relating to the lack of feeling part of a UCL-wide community, because of the large size of the student body and lack of UCL-wide events. Also a few specific comments about Institute of Education students feeling isolated from UCL. Students therefore seem to really value UCL organised opportunities for socialising and would appreciate even more opportunities for inter-departmental socialising.

In response to the question 'What's the best thing about UCL?', students told us:

- » "The people! Everyone is open, kind and understanding."
- » "Student diversity, friendly and supportive staff."
- » "Cultural diversity, lot of opportunities for extracurriculars."
- » "Community feeling."
- » "Diversity and promotion of social interactions by administration."
- » "Support for international students is comprehensive, staff are nice."
- » "Diversity, social, bustling, modern, up-to-date, cutting edge."
- » "Great student body, diversity, lot of opportunities, societies, explore what you're interested in."
- » "How easy it is to make friends, access to many resources."

## Teaching & Learning

Primarily comments about the quality of research that takes place at UCL and the opportunities for getting involved. This includes the quality of the teaching/research staff and the research facilities. There were also significant references to quality of education and academic standards generally, as well as access to networks of guest lecturers and alumni.

- » "The quality of research that is produced and proximity to those producing it."
- » "A wide range of Research Projects available across different dept."
- » "Diversity and high academic rigour."
- » "Diversity, great research facilities. Some great academics/teaching staff."
- » "It's in London. My coursemates are smart."
- » "Very high calibre of students and lecturers."
- » "Research taking place in the department."
- » "Academic excellence, lots of discussion opportunity."
- » "Academic excellence in the heart of London."
- » "Access to research, lectures with guest speakers."
- » "The great variety of the institutes composing it."
- » "Global network, broadness of research, access to journals and book collection."

## Negatives

### Libraries & Study Space

This was the second most highly commented upon category. The vast majority of comments were requests for more seating and study spaces. Some of these requests mentioned overcrowding and high student numbers specifically, whilst others were more general references to 'study space' as something that needs to be improved. There were repeated requests for more group study spaces and some for more computers. Problems with heating appeared to be making many areas of libraries uncomfortably hot or cold. Cleanliness and availability of library facilities, particularly toilets, was also commented upon frequently.

In response to the question 'What would you most like to see improved at UCL?', students told us:

- » "There's no room anywhere, too many students."
- » "Number of study spaces, heating in winter."
- » "More study space, especially for group works."
- » "I guess we should recruit less students each year. For example, the IoE building is ALWAYS packed and it's extremely hard to find a place to sit in the library. Sometimes I feel like students with insufficient academic background/skills should not be permitted to entry."
- » "More of a community feel; turn the AC off in lecture halls it's too cold!; more library space; less crowds; better sports facilities close to campus; more toilets."
- » "Library / study space always v. limited."
- » "Too many students, not enough space to study or eat"
- » "More room to study, more toilets, more facilities, academic support, personal tutors."
- » "Libraries are always crowded and the UCL Library is freezing cold! I was informed today that it is regulated by SOAS. How is that? And why can't they make it warmer for us? People are literally sitting there in coats, because it is impossible otherwise."
- » "Better facilities, more spaces for students to work, more lab spaces."
- » "More canteens, should be warmer and more seats in the libraries."
- » "The sanitation situation! How is it possible that one of the new toilets that only opened last week already has a broken seat? And how is it possible that the flush almost never works? Plus by 5 o'clock (which is when ALL my classes start) the toilets are usually so dirty that only one out of four is somewhat usable. It is disgusting."
- » "More seats in the library. More toilets in the library, they are always broken."

### Food & Drink

This area had the highest number of negative comments of all the categories. Comments were spread between requests for cheaper food and expression of frustration about expensive food, lack of spaces/seating for eating food, lack of microwaves for heating food from home, and lack of variety in food choices, with specific requests for healthier and vegetarian/vegan options. Some comments also referenced overcrowding and too many students as the reason behind the lack of space, rather than the lack of facilities. Student comments also showed concern for sustainability through requests for less plastic use. There were a few requests for a 'microwave map' that showed the locations of available microwaves across campus and many requests for more water fountains (hot and cold water dispensers).

In response to the question ‘What would you most like to see improved at UCL?’, students told us:

- » “Would love to see more vegan and vegetarian food, and less disposables and plastics.”
- » “More vegan options!!”
- » “Places are so packed, nowhere to eat.”
- » “More eating choices and space, less students.”
- » “More library and study spaces, some healthy food would be great.”
- » “More variable food that fits tastes from around the world.”
- » “Canteen needs to improve, not many places to sit and eat lunch.”
- » “Food/catering service. Dining hall location and categories. Microwave in dining hall!”
- » “More vegan and vegetarian and less meaty food in restaurants - be more eco-friendly.”
- » “Lack of diversity in food choices and quite expensive choices.”
- » “More indoor spaces with tables for sitting/lunch.”
- » “Affordable food! Please! More space within university lunch and break where the whole cohort fights for seats.”
- » “Prices of some food in the cafes are too high.”
- » “The places to have meals are very limited. And it’s very hard for students to find a micro-wave oven.”
- » “Too many students, not enough space to study or eat.”
- » “More microwaves and better maps that show us microwaves on UCL campus.”
- » “Microwave map / more microwaves; dormitory not enough; Hot water machine.”
- » “More choice of healthy food on campus at reasonable prices for students; bigger student bar! MICROWAVE MAP.”

## Amenities

Another new category added to reflect the high number of negative comments around amenities in UCL buildings, such as general references to bars, cafes, gyms, toilets, showers and sleep-pods. Many comments were general references to ‘seating’ and did not specify any particular location or use. This correlates with the comments in Food & Drink and Libraries & Study Spaces.

In response to the question ‘What should be improved at UCL?’ students told us:

- » “More seats in public areas.”
- » “Bookable sleep pods should be installed.”
- » “There should be sleep pods around campus.”
- » “More social areas.”
- » “Maintenance in library facilities/study spaces e.g. bathrooms, broken appliances etc.”
- » “Lack of changing rooms in the libraries.”
- » “Lockers, more eating space, more post grad spaces, more showers.”
- » “Spaces for student seating.”
- » “Longer opening times of Bloomsbury fitness on weekends.”
- » “More seating spaces.”

## UCL Buildings

There were a similar number of comments relating to UCL Buildings as there were for Amenities. Many comments related to vermin, water problems and heating. Also campus accessibility needs improving, both in terms of disabled access and general understanding of the campus layout. Some frustration around UCL East were also conveyed. There were also some references to accommodation problems and frustrations.

In response to the question ‘What would you most like to see improved at UCL?’, students told us:

- » “Change the names of building named after bad people.”
- » “Physical accessibility - it sucks! Lifts too small (wheelchair standards for now)”
- » “Please fix the leaking room in the Lewis building aka Huntleys.”
- » “Phineas and Huntley are dumps, not nice to sit in. Broken furniture and stained.”
- » “The campus is like a labyrinth, easy to get lost”
- » “Please clean - there are MICE in Roberts.”
- » “Get rid of UCL East, it is ridiculous idea. Stop letting everyone in.”
- » “Random campus in Stratford makes no sense.”
- » “James Lighthill House is a disaster. Mice everywhere.”
- » “Quality of accommodation, facilities; Price of accommodation; should receive more tuition for the money I pay.”
- » “The lecture theatres. The accessibility to buildings.”
- » “I’d like to see where our money is going into - can’t see it at Maths department (old buildings - not even new lecture halls - i.e. hotel conference halls etc.)”
- » “Mice in the maths and union buildings, hygiene issues.”
- » “Illogical design of halls.”
- » “Too big, UCL-Go map is not useful, need more signs on campus.”



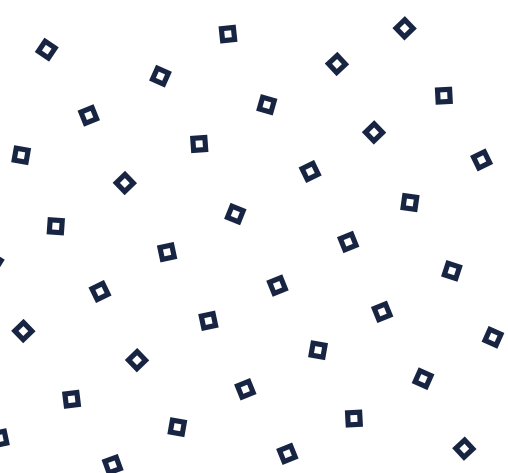
## Recommendations:

### 1. Teaching Rooms & Class Sizes

Over the past three years, students have raised concerns about the teaching estate. There is an appreciation that the campus requires investment and that it will take time for this investment to be realised into an improved estate. However, there is urgent action needed to address the student concern in this area as it is having an increasingly negative impact on students' experiences.

**To ensure students' experiences of Teaching Rooms and Class Sizes improve, we recommend that UCL should urgently:**

- a. As recommended in May 2018, ensure that booked rooms are actually used, that unused bookings can be reported quickly and easily, and that those using the system thoughtlessly face some form of consequence.
- b. As recommended in May 2018, ensure teaching is scheduled equally across the week, and that space is not underutilised on Monday mornings and Friday afternoons, as is presently the case.
- c. As recommended in May 2018, ensure staff with multiple responsibilities cannot make themselves unavailable for teaching at certain times based only on individual preferences.
- d. As recommended in May 2018, investigate whether varied local and central ownership of teaching space currently enables us to use space effectively, and take forward changes in this area if it does not do so.
- e. Ensure sufficient guidance and training is provided to teaching staff so that they are familiar with the spaces allocated for their teaching activities.
- f. Develop guidance on class sizes and ensure there is clearer definitions on differing teaching delivery modes such as seminars, workshops and tutorials.
- g. Work with the Union, on an institutional wide consultation to review the length of the teaching day and how this may reduce the pressure on the teaching estate.





## 2. Specific Student Groups

It is often unusual for the needs and interests of minority groups to surface in more general discussions where they may not be significantly represented by peers who fall within these groups. We could say that the fact that these issues are more prominently noted in our analysis broadly across the institution and felt so deeply negatively is paramount of the struggle that these students are experiencing.

Part-time students are often balancing commitments outside of their student life and therefore require greater notice and attention in the support, facilities and opportunities we provide for them. They often feel like they are tagged along to the programme and expected to engage in the same way that full-time students can without much attention or effort made to ensure that the ways in which we do so are fit for their circumstances. We find that students who have significant commitments outside of their studies, often require much more notice on changes to the timing of their activities at university in terms of making particular arrangements to cover their other commitments.

In May 2016, we published a report and recommendations on PGR space which recommendations for improving the experience of research students. We have been working with the Doctoral School on moving forward with these improvements. It is clear that we need to move at a greater pace on improving the provision of space for our research student body as this is continuing to have a negative impact on the experience of research students.

**To ensure that the experiences of these students are considered and efforts are made to make them feel included and values, we recommend that UCL should:**

- a. Conduct a review of the experience of part-time students and ensure that we deliver focussed and inclusive support, facilities and opportunities that improve their student journey.
- b. As previously recommended in our report on PGR space (May 2016), adequate desk space, pro-rata to the research student population, should be allocated and provided for research students at the discipline, department or faculty level.



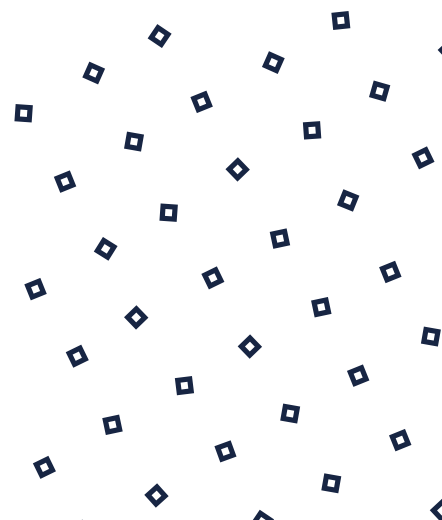
### **3. Assessment Preparation**

The relevancy and usefulness of assessment criteria is still prevalent amongst students. It is often reported that students are confused by assessment instructions and feel unprepared for assessments.

We reported last year that it seems that there are some parts of UCL where criteria has been developed to describe generic learning outcomes. Students continue to find it difficult to relate this to their learning and hence causes confusion rather than clarity in their preparation for assessments, this is particularly an issue when the instructions from teaching staff conflict with the generic learning outcomes outlined to students.

**To ensure that students are prepared for their assessments and have the best opportunity to succeed, we recommend that UCL should:**

- a. Ensure learning outcomes are relevant to the module and assessment diet, which is accessibly written and discussed with students ahead of their assessment on the module.
- b. Investigate the integration of assessment criteria for modules into the Online Module Catalogue to ensure that students have a clear and accessible route in determining the definitive criteria of which they will be assessed.
- c. Integrate the review of learning outcomes and assessment criteria into the approval process for modules and programmes, so that the linkage between learning outcomes and assessment criteria is clear and appropriate.
- d. Explore the development of exam preparation and revision skills training as part of UCL's work on the creation of an Academic Communication Support Centre.



# Student Priorities for Education Report

Trends in Student Feedback



**U** STUDENTS'  
UNION UCL

**Summer 2019**

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