



Leicester Students' Union *Student Conversations* Project – End of Semester Review (Semester One)

What is the *Student Conversations* Project?

The Union *Student Conversations* Project is an initiative where each member of Leicester Students' Union staff will go out and speak to students throughout the week and gather simple feedback on their experience.

Why are we doing it?

- 1) To collect general feedback about the student experience to find out what matters to students at a particular point of the term. In turn, this feedback is fed to the appropriate department, and actioned. Actions can take the form of conducting more specific consultation based upon a particular topic (e.g. the Shuttle Bus service), fixing the problem (buying more library books for Law students), or feeding the feedback into a more gradual change into strategies (if the feedback is regarding institutional or departmental culture, or is not easily implemented.)
- 2) To improve the student experience by finding out what we do well, and what we can improve on. Often we wait until particular 'trigger points' (such as the NSS, end of module reviews) to collect feedback. Although this feedback is useful, it is helpful to have a means of collecting student feedback throughout the year to identify any warning signs. If the relevant student service or department is aware of these signs, they can take appropriate measures to either fix the problem, or ensure that students know that they are aware of the issue and are taking steps to improve the student experience. It is also equally as important to celebrate the successes of departments and University services, so we can identify and share good practice, but also show that the hard work of staff members across the University and Students' Union does not go unnoticed by students.
- 3) To improve Students' Union visibility and accountability to our membership. The key purposes of a Students' Union is to support students, provide opportunities for students and lobby for changes that improve their experiences. By reaching out and speaking to students directly, we are interacting with a broader group of our members and improving our visibility. As well as improving our accountability, this also gives us an opportunity to let our members know about the kinds of services and opportunities that we offer.

Who did we speak to?

Over the course of our pilot term, we spoke to **1651** students across **34 courses or home departments**. Within these courses and departments (for example Informatics and Biological Sciences), we spoke to students across most streams, and Joint-Honours students. Joint Honours and Major-Minor students were categorised by their home department, however both departments did receive the student feedback if it was directly relevant to their courses.

Students were spoken to across Main and Brookfield campus, with the majority of conversations occurring within the Students' Union building, the Charles Wilson Building, the Library open areas and Centenary Square (and surrounding open areas.) We also gathered data from Students' Union events such as Meet Your Mentor events and Course Representative lunches.

The majority of the students we spoke to were **Undergraduates** however we did speak to some PGT and PGR students. In future, we will be more explicit when asking students the questions if they are an Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught or Postgraduate Research student, and their year of study. We did not monitor the number of home and international students we spoke to this term.

What did we ask?

- 1) What is your favourite thing about your student experience?
- 2) What would you most like to change about your student experience?
- 3) What is your course? (optional, formerly what is your student email address)

The questions were deliberately kept simple to ensure student participants could be as free and open as they liked with their responses. Limitations included the feedback sometimes being vague and difficult to action (for example if a Geography student asked for more books, but didn't identify the module) however it did put issues on the radar to be discussed at other forums such as Student-Staff committees or in other research projects.

What did we find out?

Please see the end of this document for two word clouds showing the frequency of key words students used when answering both questions.

1) What is your favourite thing about your student experience?

Across our sample, the top six themes during the semester were:

- 1) My course – 16.6% of participants
- 2) Meeting people -12.9% of participants
- 3) Activities (Students' Union) – 9.5% of participants
- 4) Campus Facilities – 9.5% of participants
- 5) Sense of community – 9.3% of participants
- 6) Independence – 8.4% of participants

My course

Students commented that their favourite part of their student experience was specialising in a course they were interested in. Across Life Sciences and Science and Engineering, practical, lab and field-based work was most popular. In the School of Arts, the flexibility of broad module choices and seminar-based teaching was commended. Especially towards the beginning of term, the community/family feel within departments was a key feature that students brought up, fostering a friendly atmosphere between students and staff, and within cohorts.

Meeting people

Meeting people, making friends and forming networks has been consistently ranked as one of the key favourite aspects of the student experience. There was no clear indicator on the most common way that students were making friends, however it was clear that students were doing this through their courses, accommodation and common interests (sports and societies.) Meeting people and making friends became the most common popular thing about the student experience towards the end of term. This could indicate that as deadlines and pressure mounts on students, they rely on their friends as a support network to help them through more challenging periods of University, but also offer a respite to revision and assignments.

Activities

Students' Union activities, including societies and volunteering, was again consistently ranked as a top theme, but scored particularly highly towards the middle of the term. This indicates good participation, which would contribute to other highly scoring factors such as sense of community and meeting new people. Respondents commented on the high range of societies available, and how it was a good way to gain new skills and make new friends.

Campus facilities

Campus facilities on the whole were viewed consistently favourably throughout term. In particular, the library facilities and modern buildings such as the George Davies Centre for Medicine were seen as clean, bright and inviting. Students liked the small, community feel of campus, and in general (aside from Brookfield) found it easy to navigate.

Sense of Community

Although Sense of Community peaked towards the beginning of term, the number of students citing community feel and atmosphere as their favourite aspect of University dropped as the term progressed, in favour of other aspects such as making friends, and enjoying their course. Reasons for this could include the reduction of campus events after the Fresher's period, and departments focusing on academic support after induction. This does not necessarily mean that there is not a community feel within departments and across campus (as course, and making friends are still highly ranked), however it does mean that as term progresses their perception of what is most important about University life has changed.

Independence

Independence was a theme that rose towards the close of the semester. Students liked the freedom away from home, but also enjoyed the autonomy of studying at University and working when it suited them (around other commitments such as part-time work). This appreciation of independence could signify why certain timetabling issues (such as having lectures dotted around the week) are perceived as a problem for many kinds of students, and not just those who commute or have caring commitments.

2) What would you most like to change about your student experience?

Across the sample, our top six themes during the semester were:

- 1) My course – 18% of participants
- 2) No opinion – 14.6% of participants
- 3) Food – 14.1% of participants
- 4) Campus Facilities (including the Library) – 13.5% of participants
- 5) Sport and Gym – 6.1% of participants
- 6) Accommodation – 5.5% of participants

My Course, and Campus facilities feature highly on both lists. This is because they reflect different aspects of the course, and facilities experiences. Furthermore, as both are integral parts of University life and are experienced or used regularly throughout the semester, there is an increased likelihood of potential issues occurring, that have been reported through the Student Conversations project.

My course

As well as being the top aspect of University life that students enjoyed the most, it was also the thing they most wanted to change. To break this down further, please see the table overleaf for the top five most commonly reported areas for development.

Table 1: What do students want to improve about their course?

Timetabling	28.08%
Administration and Customer Service	11.54%
Curriculum	10.00%
Assessment	6.54%
Personal tutor	6.15%

Timetabling

The main timetabling issue was that across courses, timetabling was inconsistent, with some very busy days with no breaks, to some days with only one lecture in the morning. Particularly for commuter students, students with other commitments (part time work, caring responsibilities) and those who lived in Oadby, this was seen as inconvenient and a barrier to their independence.

Administration and Customer Service

These comments related mainly to the regularity of uploads onto Blackboard being inconsistent, information (such as deadlines, reading lists) being difficult to find online, and poor communication with regards to timetable changes and long delays in replies from lecturers and administrators.

Curriculum

Pacing and the level of assumed knowledge was also a common theme, as the curriculum and delivery methods across courses was seen as inconsistent (too easy in some areas, and too much assumed knowledge/quick pacing in others.) In some areas, particularly in the Humanities, there was a call to diversify the curriculum to reflect authors and research from a wider variety of backgrounds. However, there was acknowledgement from some students that they knew that this was in process. Furthermore, there was demand for more field/trip based work, and lecture content that could be applied to the real world.

Assessment

Comments included a call for more diverse assessment types across all courses, and arrangements so that deadlines did not aggregate together.

Personal tutors

Comments related to personal tutoring acknowledged that there is an inconsistency amongst tutors within the University. The key comment was that students wanted it to be easier to get hold of their personal tutor, and wanted personal tutors to be mandated to have meetings at least once a term.

No opinion

The number of students who either did not have an opinion, or have any problems with their student experience remained consistently high, however as term progressed the number of students who gave this answer reduced. Reasons behind why many students did not have an answer include: that students felt they were put on the spot and could not give an answer; that students felt that they could not be honest; that as they had only been at Leicester a short time students could not think of any reasons, or simply that they were content with their student experience.

Although it is difficult to gather any recommendations from these comments, it does indicate that around 15% of those surveyed reported to us that they are generally happy with their student experience.

Food on campus

Again a recurring theme across the semester, food was the single-most specific area (discounting 'my course' as this covered a variety of issues) that students wished to improve. By far, the biggest issue was the high cost of food on campus, followed by the lack of variety (and cost) for those with dietary requirements (gluten free, vegan, halal, allergies). Furthermore, the short opening times of some outlets, including Gees diner caused queues and disrupted short lunch breaks (related to inconsistent timetabling) whereas outlets were not open at convenient hours for those on more intense courses (such as Medicine, PhD students.)

Campus facilities

Towards the end of the semester, comments regarding a lack of study space, particularly in the library increased. Furthermore, students expressed an interest in more social learning space within the library, and more places to eat. Students commented on certain older buildings, such as Attenborough, Adrian, Archaeology, MSB being old, unpleasant to be in, and not functional (leaks, inconsistent heating, not energy efficient.) A need for more social seating space was also identified.

Sport and Gym

Particularly at the beginning of the semester, there were a significant number of comments regarding Sport and Gym facilities on campus. These comments fitted into two themes: the high cost of sport and lack of flexible payment options, and the perceived lack of resources for those who are athletes.

Accommodation

Again, negative comments regarding accommodation were localised towards the beginning of the semester. The majority of the negative comments were not regarding the quality of accommodation (although there were a few hiccoughs during moving in) but rather the location of Oadby Student Village. Students commented that before they moved in, they had not understood the distance from Oadby to Main Campus, so this had come as a surprise. Because of this, the cost of the bus (Arriva or Shuttle) was perceived as unexpected.

What feedback have we had from Departments and Professional Services?

Of the 39 departments (including Academic, Professional Services and Students' Union) who received feedback, 28 departments have responded at least once this semester. We have received 75 individual comments in relation to the student feedback. All key actions that were identified as imperative to action have been responded to. The project results are also a recurring agenda item in a range of University meetings. We have been really pleased to see a high level of engagement with those who have replied, especially within Student and Academic Services

Departments who have not responded to their reports have been identified¹ and although we have not received full engagement, the kinds of issues raised were quite general which could explain a lack of response. As many of the student comments regarding their courses are very positive, I would encourage all departments to engage with their

¹ We have not received comments from Archaeology, English, History, History of Art, Informatics, Law, Mathematics, Media, Medicine, Modern Languages and Natural Sciences

results. If emails have been missed or sent to the incorrect individual, I have a log of all of the reports written so far and can provide information as needed.

Course representatives also receive the Student Conversations reports, to ensure that if a departmental issue has been raised through the project, there is a secondary method in ensuring it is discussed. As good practice, courses such as Geography (and others) are discussing the Student Conversations points at Student Staff Committees anyway.

Union Wins

Although the project is relatively new, we have achieved some key wins for students related to the project:

These include (but are not limited to):

- 1) A redevelopment of the Here 4 Value food range, including widening the range of food available and in some places reducing price points. A marketing campaign will highlight these changes next semester (the cheaper range comes in from 14/12/18). (Here 4 U)
- 2) A consultation on the Shuttle-Bus service, with a view to improve and extend the service next semester (Estates and Campus Services)
- 3) More social events within the Chemistry department (Chemistry)
- 4) Integration of more Industry touch points in the development of the new curriculum (Engineering)
- 5) The Percy Gee Redevelopment – although not strictly as a result of the Conversations project, this will partially address the need for more social space on campus (Students' Union/Estates and Campus Services)
- 6) Identifying areas that do not have enough textbooks in the library to order more (Accounting and Finance)
- 7) Review of Activities (Societies) administration processes and training to make creating, joining and running a society easier
- 8) Breakfast with the Head of Department and Course Convenor to build community and give an opportunity for informal feedback (Criminology)
- 9) Continuing putting more water fountains on campus (Estates and Campus Services)
- 10) A review of Freshers (and alcohol impact on campus) to ensure Students' Union activities are accessible to all students (Students' Union)
- 11) A review next semester of Sport and Gym provisions (BUCS and non-BUCS) (Students' Union, Sport and Active Life)

A significant proportion of the issues raised are complex and will take time to resolve, however University engagement with the project has been high. It is promising to see that many of the areas for development are



areas where significant work is taking place to improve the student experience for example building redevelopments, curriculum transformation or the integration of employability opportunities in the curriculum.



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Q3 What do you love about your student experience?

department events campus experience really nice city staff students meet people
 many opportunities lectures work activities socialise things Nice campus going
 many things space lecturers part environment social aspect helpful fun
 opportunities time Social life easy study range facilities
 everyone really diversity friends nights University Learning
 library available great away home SU food
 Meeting new make friends campus different
 good union course really good societies
 Leicester new people personal tutor people uni
 student building friendly community lots interesting
 events student groups nice teaching independence help
 staff offer make Students Union social feel freedom accommodation
 love Oadby support Learning new welcoming Starbucks O2 lots opportunities
 SU
 building far atmosphere try new Everything easy access Meeting
 range societies diverse making new sports Living supportive new friends



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Q4 What would you like to change about your student experience?

