The UNION

National Student Survey Qualitative Report

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- Qualitative Data Analysis – Methodology
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- **3686 qualitative comments** provided by students in their final year of undergraduate studies were analysed line-by-line, using a series of coding techniques.
- A total of **7984 instances (as comments can fall into multiple categories)** have been coded at 103 groups.
- The resulting **103 groups** were split in 6 themes:
  1. Teaching and learning
  2. Support, resources and facilities
  3. Employability
  4. Course organisation and administration
  5. Union-related comments
  6. Others.

Introduction

- The NSS gathers honest opinions from third (or final) year undergraduate students about their time in higher education, their course, and their institution.
- The NSS asks 27 questions on 8 aspects of the student experience:
    1. Teaching
    2. Learning opportunities
    3. Assessment and feedback
    4. Academic support
    5. Organisation and management
    6. Learning resources
    7. Learning community
    8. Student voice

- The NSS is conducted to:
    1. Inform student choice, for it provides an opportunity for current students to tell future students about the quality of the course (through the Unistats)
    2. Provide information to enhance the student experience
    3. Provide public assurance, for the survey acts as a mechanism for the general public to be provided with information about the quality of higher education.

- All data was coded line-by-line, with the researcher attaching various qualitative coding methods **(in vivo, concept, descriptive, pattern etc.)** to the text as appropriate.

- **7984 instances** have been coded into **103 groups**
  - **38 were associated with positive meanings**
  - **62 mentioned improvements or were negative in nature**
  - **3 were neutral (or value free)**

- The 103 groups were further categorised in **6 comprehensive themes**;

- Notes have been attached to both the data and the codes as the analysis progressed to ensure ideas were not lost in the process as well as highlighting quotations.

Thematic Findings – Overview

Theme 1: Teaching & Learning	• Items which have been coded at nodes categorised in sub-themes such as: ○ Teaching curriculum; ○ Quality of teaching; ○ Quality of feedback; ○ Assessments and marking; ○ Academic staff;
Theme 2: Support, Resources & Facilities	• Comments relating to the wellbeing and advice services, and pastoral support. • Student's comments on the learning and teaching resources provided by the University of Portsmouth, which do NOT include: 1. The Placement Centre; 2. Employability;
Theme 3: Employability	• Comments on themes such as: ○ The employability service; ○ Work and volunteering opportunities; ○ Placement and internship support; ○ (Practical) Learning activities which contribute towards one's employability.
Theme 4: Course Organisation & Admin	○ Admin; ○ Timetabling; ○ Attendance monitoring system; ○ Location of teaching rooms;
Theme 5: The Union	• Students' commentary on the Union as an organisation at the centre of, and supporting student life;
Theme 6: Others	○ Tuition fees; ○ The (new) UoP logo; ○ The city of Portsmouth; ○ The weather.

Overview:

- Students have provided comments on various aspects of teaching and learning, including:

    ■ The quality of teaching

    ■ The contents of the curriculum

    ■ The quality of feedback

    ■ The structure of assessments and marking

    ■ The layout of the academic year

    ■ Various aspects related to the characteristics of teaching staff

    ■ Academic support.

Quality of Teaching	"Overall, I am very happy to the outcome I am getting in university. The grades that I'm getting are not outstanding but tutors never left me alone and always motivating me when I get lost. This university has really helped me grow as a person and intellectually." "Most of the lecturers really take an interest in making sure we all do our best and are so willing to help when we need it." "Most of the teachers and lecturers are always willing to help; some of them provide other avenues to contact them outside normal contact hours." "It is easy to contact the lecturers and they convey that they genuinely care for the wellbeing of every individual student which is really nice to see." "Course is very intellectually stimulating and draws on real life experiences to bring out learning outcomes."
Assessment Structure	"Expectations for assignments can sometimes be vague and require clarification." "The recent introduction of online submissions for assessments had led to a reduction in detailed feedback. This is something that is especially important in final year." "Sometimes the lecturer's instructions for course are not clear — the coursework instructions are sometimes not sufficient."
Dissertation	"I have not received sufficient help with my dissertation and often find myself getting so stressed and anxious, I think next year there needs to be more regulation of how many meetings and tutorials are being led per group. There also needs to be timetabled lectures throughout the year on things like how to write a literature review because no one has a clue and we are just left to our own devices with this!" "When picking our topics for the dissertation, little guidance of what we were supposed to do and when we had a time pressure for booking fieldwork places for the summer holidays a little more guidance would be useful." "Poorly organised when allocating dissertation supervisors. It was stressed that I book interviews with supervisors before picking them, which didn't help as I got no one related to my area of interest. Whereas people who didn't book interviews were picked to get their first choice as they did not take the opportunity to look at anyone else. It's ridiculous as the supervisor you are then given has no insight on the area you want to cover."
Feedback	"Feedback is not always useful. Some has been discouraging and ends up demotivating me at the start of the next unit. Some feedback has just left me clueless and uncertain." "Sometimes the feedback given at different times is contradictory. The feedback on work highlights the positives, mentions the negatives but does not allow advice you on how to change to improve." "The recent introduction of online submissions for assessments had led to a reduction in detailed feedback. This is something that is especially important in final year."
Marking	"At the beginning, it was unclear how marking of our assignments were carried out such that I found it hard to know what to specifically do to get a first or 2:1. I learnt this through trial and error throughout first and second year." "Contrasting feedback between different lecturers, there should be set guidelines all tutors should follow. Everyone seems to mark differently and I have lost marks on an essay for a certain reason, then when I stopped doing that I lost marks on another essay and was told I need to do the thing the other lecturer told me not to do which can get very frustrating."

Overview:

- 218 comments centred on;
    - Support for:
        - ❖ Students with disabilities
        - ❖ International students
        - ❖ Mature students
        - ❖ Learning
        - ❖ Wellbeing & mental health
    - Resources:
        - ❖ IT resources – including computers & software
        - ❖ Moodle
        - ❖ Online resources
    - Facilities:
        - ❖ The University bus
        - ❖ Library
        - ❖ Food outlets
        - ❖ Printing

Students with disabilities	• "I am a mature student with a disability, though on appearance it is not visible. Tutors on occasions neglected to fully understand what I was trying to explain to them regarding my condition and how extra pressures of group work, for example. The disability services provided was very hands off, and when discussing problems with them, at times they would get involved unless you specifically asked them. I felt unsupported and when medical evidence was provided for assistance in exam (e.g., a computer) these were overlooked and I received no leeway or consideration that I had 3 of 4 exams without the proper equipment."
International students	• "Being international student, nobody really inducted me into to everything. It would be nice to be welcomed. No idea how to write assignments, nobody explained. An example was referencing — we don't do that in Italy so an induction would have been nice to know how to do things. Also, I didn't know how we were assessed, nobody explained so I made mistakes writing the wrong things. I think there needs to be more care for international students."
Mature students	• "[It's] a mess especially if you have children and a mature student. I do think the mature students should be thought of more. My children have school holidays and I can't attend. My timetable was never right and cancelled lectures not replaced if you can't attend another." • "I understand that the younger students are the majority but why should the mature student have to struggle like I have and when I do approach the subject I am told, well they always think of the younger majority first. Other universities have breaks at the same time as the local schools so that mature students don't miss out"
Learning	• "The learning support tutors are great and the dissertation workshops that they do are really useful." • "I know I was very well supported by academic staff and other people that's a positive."
Wellbeing & mental health	• "More support for students with mental health illnesses often support that is offered is not always suitable such as apart counselling and individual tutors who help with organising your workload. You may not require counselling or have already had it but it is very good that it is available…In regards to mental health often individuals manage pretty well most of the time but will have good and bad days and on those bad days it would be really helpful to be able to have an extension on any approaching deadlines if the student feels that they need it, without having to always prove your illness with a doctor's note. Also, it would be helpful if the university take into account student with an illness/disability will not always be able to attend and being informed that they are not attending enough, only puts more pressure and worry on the individual. If these changes were made, it would have made my university experience at lot easier."

IT Resources	● "Licence for software not available when needed, and not available at all for MacBook and some old laptops which is highly inconvenient around Christmas/New Year time when students are home or when library is not open 24/7." ● "The library doesn't provide the software and computers necessary for our work so that is out of bounds for Computer Games Tech students. Some of the software provided is out-dated and simply not updated (Unreal Engine 4, Substance Painter, 3DS Max). Not enough learning resources for CGT students. Pluralsight and some other subscription-based guide/tutorial website would be nice to have access to since our only wealth of knowledge appears to be mostly YouTube and the staff." ● "A lack of access to relevant up-to-date software outside of creative technology building, software in the library is severely outdated and cannot be used with any work created in up-to-date software. Software such as 3DS Max, Unreal engine and Allegorithmic software packages including Substance Designer and Painter would be incredibly helpful to have in the library as currently if we cannot find any space in our building we cannot do any work, and we are entirely at the mercy of the building opening hours to get work done. I understand that the machines in the library aren't perhaps as powerful but even just the ability to access the files, try, and get small pieces done would be a massive help."
Computers	● "The laptops are slow, dated, desktop computers are regularly full, and it is always a struggle to find seating." ● "I believe they need even more workspaces, particularly computers. On multiple occasions, I have wandered for a considerable length of time trying to find somewhere to work."
Online Resources & Moodle	● "Sometimes Moodle was down when you needed it, due to a high volume of students trying to access it." ● "We have had problems with Moodle regularly." ● …but "fantastic online resources"

Library	"Furthermore, the university is expanding which I have realised over the years. This means the library and some facilities and resources available are really limited. E.g., the library needs more copies of books for my course, as it is a real struggle." "There is only one library — I feel like this complaint is continuously falling on deaf ears. I have been making this complaint for 2 years. You're more than happy to increase student fees — but you will only invest in buildings that will make you money such as student housing. If I'm paying 9250 (soon to be 9500 I'm sure), I expect certain standards. Your buildings are outdated and poorly decorated. If I could study at a different university but take the lecturers from Portsmouth, I would — they're the only reason I would consider staying to do masters" "The library is just too small for the number of students that use it. I often have to go at unsociable hours of the night just so I have the use of a computer or an area with comfortable space to work. There are enough laptops though, but there is almost never a place to sit. I have seen people sitting on the floor because they can't find a seat."
University Bus	"Unreliable bus service at times." "Could do with an improvement to the university bus service."
Printing	"The vast expense of the printing over the 3 years. I don't think I could even calculate how much I have spent which I think is crazy considering I pay over £9000 a year." "The prices for printing are extortionate."

Overview:

- 139 comments centred on;
  - Support (…and lack thereof)
  - Practical teaching activities
  - Placements and internships
  - Volunteering opportunities
  - Study abroad & Erasmus

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General Employment Opportunities	"Wide variety of opportunities is available to students in all areas, from careers to extracurricular to volunteering." "It gives you a chance to choose best option that is more suitable for you, helps to choose your career path." "They always emailed us about future career opportunities." "I feel as though I have always been surrounded by staff who are approachable and are able to give me advice on assessments, careers, placements, etc." "External opportunities and work experiences are available if you are willing to work to get them."
Employability through Teaching	"Heavy emphasis on employable skills." "The skills learnt are great for employability." "he employability unit in second year has provided strong support in my third year" "At the end of the day I got the job, thank to this course." "For my Learning from Experience unit, we were able to undertake a work placement, which was really helpful to build our portfolio for the future and gain more experience in the area we were thinking of entering."
Study Abroad & Erasmus	"One of with being a study abroad year in Oslo, Norway, where I further explored my academic interested and encountered different cultural perspectives upon Criminology." "Ability to go abroad — Erasmus — student exchange — university helped me."
Placements & Internships	"The opportunity to do a self-employed placement changed my life. I learnt invaluable skills thanks to the courses set out by the uni and it gave us the opportunity to test the waters of business for a whole year. We are now planning to continue the business full time for our careers." "The university provided good support when finding a placement. They provided multiple resources and ran numerous workshops to ensure students were prepared for the challenges we would face when attempting to secure one." "Huge amount of support in regards to securing a placement in third year of the course, hugely valuable experience! It improved not only my work ethic going into final year but now have a strong understanding of how marketing is applied in real environments and set me up for jobs upon graduating. Without the university's support at this stage, I would have found it extremely difficult and they provided a lot of support in securing the placement itself as well as preparation for interviews/assessment days."

Overview:

- 80 comments; out of which 27 positive and 53 negative on:
  - timetabling;
  - course administration;
  - organisation of the teaching;
  - implementation of student feedback;

- The majority of comments were on timetabling (56 in total).

Lack of flexibility	• "Most disappointing over the years has been the lack of flexibility with timetabling, and having a really poor timetable every year. (Being told that travelling 2 hours each way to uni is not a good enough reason to be moved into another seminar that is available that would remove a 6-hour break, etc.). The way the communication system of who is able to contact timetabling department works, makes this completely dysfunctional."
Lack of consideration for commuters	• "More individual for me, I don't live in the city of the university so sometimes travelling in for one lecture can be tiresome, I sometimes feel that if the lectures were all held on one or two days a week it would save me travelling time, and therefore gives me more time to complete work. But is only minor, I knew that would be the case when I started university."
Lack of consideration for mature students	• "This course has not been applied with interests to more mature students and the lifestyles they lead. The timetable is (especially in the later years) so vastly sparse with disorganised lecture times. This is difficult for more mature students to accommodate with some being parents and having to work multiple jobs to fund university and home lives, etc."
Lack of consideration for students with dependents	• "Central timetabling. Not getting access to the timetable in enough time to book childcare for Sept. Or any indication of it!"

Malfunctions	"Wide variety of opportunities is available to students in all areas, from careers to extracurricular to volunteering." "It gives you a chance to choose best option that is more suitable for you, helps to choose your career path." "They always emailed us about future career opportunities." "I feel as though I have always been surrounded by staff who are approachable and are able to give me advice on assessments, careers, placements, etc." "External opportunities and work experiences are available if you are willing to work to get them."
Burden of Proof	"Heavy emphasis on employable skills." "The skills learnt are great for employability." "he employability unit in second year has provided strong support in my third year" "At the end of the day I got the job, thank to this course." "For my Learning from Experience unit, we were able to undertake a work placement, which was really helpful to build our portfolio for the future and gain more experience in the area we were thinking of entering."
System of control	"One of with being a study abroad year in Oslo, Norway, where I further explored my academic interested and encountered different cultural perspectives upon Criminology." "Ability to go abroad — Erasmus — student exchange — university helped me."

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Slow Implementation of Student Feedback	• "Some of the changes made to the course were needed, but were too late and held large proportions of students back. Changes have been made this year in regards to marking and compensation which again put us at a disadvantage, sometimes it feel like the school is just working against us. New schemes added to help prepare us for pre-registration are a great idea, but what has been introduced isn't good enough, and certainly too late for 4th year students." • "Feedback is given but it takes 3 years for that feedback to take effect meaning it never benefits us, and instead benefits students 3 years behind us"
Retrospective Implementation of Student Feedback	• "I personally find it unfair that the feedback given by higher years (i.e., recent 4th year graduates) are applied to the incoming students (i.e., incoming 4th years), some feedback that were provided by the previous students are not really what the currents students would want." • "The feedback I give in the academic year I'm coming from should be tailored to the year I am going into, rather than people in the year above giving feedback on their experience and then using that feedback on the year group coming in. It's a completely different group of people."

- 36 comments, out of which 13 positive, and 23 negative.

POSITIVES	NEGATIVES
• **UPSU as inclusive, helpful and supportive:** "The Students' Union is very helpful and care for all the students and inclusive." "The Student Union offers excellent support for students on numerous situations and can completely turnaround a bad situation." "The Students' Union has been extremely helpful in all aspects, in both personal and professional matters." • **UPSU as an organiser of events:** "The Student Union — events, societies and community." • **UPSU as a provider of opportunities:** "Opportunities at the Student Union — societies." • **UPSU as the home of clubs and societies:** "Clubs, which are part of the Student Union, offer a great balance to the academic challenges of the course." "The university has a very active athletic union, that I have taken part in in all my three years. It has enhanced my experience so very much. I have been able to make friends on different courses and different years."	• **UPSU as selectively representative:** "The Students' Union is not particularly a representative of the students' interests, and instead tends to be more interested in furthering the careers of a select few union officers. Nepotism is rife, and attempts to raise issues specific to our University are ignored and deflected in favour of charity campaigning and 'raising awareness' of international issues that are not relevant to the bulk of students. In addition, the union is very resistant to attempts to change these issues." "The Student Union doesn't always represent the views of students." "Students' Union hasn't reflected my needs in their actions." • **UPSU failing to engage with students:** "The Student Union has been woeful the whole time I've been at the university & has got worse every year. Not interested in engaging students or encouraging voter registration drive. Non-student staff have often been highly rude and patronising." "Advertisement and events at the Student Union are lacking compared to other universities." "The above also counts for the Students' Union — unless a student is heavily involved in the union through societies/AU, they are unaware of what else they have to offer (advice and well-being, SABB elections, etc.)."

- "Poor value for money. Tuition fees are unreasonable for amount of contact time and workshop facilities available to School of Engineering students."
- "It is also very clear that university funding for my course is lower than other courses. This is upsetting when you are paying £9,000 (now 9,250) per year."
- "Also, for the amount of money I am paying to go here 8 hours of teaching is pretty low. How can I gain £9000 worth of value from receiving 8 hours of teaching a week? With lectures and seminars all uploaded online, a lot of students don't even bother showing up unless attendance is mandatory. University is all about individual study and research, etc. But for this money I and my family, etc. expected a greater amount of teaching being scheduled. For some units, you might as well buy the textbook and do the entire thing yourself."
- "Vastly overpriced for what it is."
- "Despite the huge tuition fees, the university was unable to provide us with resources we needed at home such as the Adobe Suite, so we could only use it in University. This was commonly requested and brought up by people on the course and the response was that they didn't have enough money, despite the fact that every student has paid at least £27,000 to use it."
- "I think the course length could be reduced due to the amount of contact time. £9000 is a large sum of money to pay when contact time is only 5 hours a week in the third year. Otherwise, more resources should be provided such as an allowance towards books or more money towards printer credits in order for the course to be of a greater value for money."
- "Also, I think there should be more lectures/seminars as two 2-hour sessions a week is not sufficient (and not what we pay £9000 for)."
- "pay over 9,000 per year and yet I don't feel I get enough teaching hours, I am full time and I am only in University 10 hours per week and not always. I understand that the younger students are the majority but why should the mature student have to struggle like I have and when I do approach the subject I am told, well they always think of the younger majority first. Other universities have breaks at the same time as the local schools so that mature students don't miss out, Suffolk University in Ipswich. I sometimes wonder why I pay so much and get really so little? I don't even get provided with the textbooks required I have to buy them, if I can, and then they only get used once for the year and you can never recover your money so they get given away. For 9,000, there is still a lot for students to pay out for that if you were at school it would be provided."