

**Royal Holloway Students' Union
Department Rep Briefing**

Department: Biological Sciences

For the Academic year: 2026-27

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Background

Department briefings are prepared annually, collating the data from the Staff-Student Action Meeting (SSAM) and the outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS). The briefing aims to give an understanding of the student opinions of the activities within the department.

Commentary

The following data is a summary of some of the key themes discussed in the 'Negative' and 'Positive' student responses to the NSS survey open-text question, 'Looking back on your experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects you would like to highlight?' Comments have been cross-referenced with minutes from the SSAMs which ran during the same academic year. Any topic solely discussed during SSAMs and not in the NSS have been clearly identified in the table as (SSAM).

Key Themes	Commentary	
	Things working well	Areas for improvement
Community	▪ Welcoming department ▪ Positive relationships and collaboration between students are encouraged ▪ Implementation of a buddy system to support first years (SSAMs)	▪ Few opportunities to network ▪ Some students feel not included and underrepresented within university and student communities ▪ Students feel a disconnect with lecturers. First year students feel divided from third year and so are apprehensive to join BioSoc (SSAMs)
Facilities	• Great teaching rooms • Moodle is well organised • Good library facilities • Fieldtrips	▪ Limited study space ▪ Struggles with accessing MacMillan textbooks (SSAMs)
Teaching	• Interactive social learning via lab work • Practical skills development through field work • Teaching is engaging and intellectually stimulating	▪ Lack of practical skills development ▪ Some areas of study underrepresented ▪ Poor organisation of lab work

	• Lecturers enthusiastic about teaching • Great range of taught topics	▪ Imbalance between independent and dependent learning ▪ Lack of online learning ▪ Lectures difficult to understand or not engaging ▪ Number of times presenting to peers is overwhelming
Assessment	▪ Assignments challenging, but rewarding ▪ Useful assignment feedback ▪ Third year project is flexible and allows for professional development	▪ Deadline stacking ▪ Lack of feedback and long wait ▪ Inconsistences in marking ▪ Peer marking is biased ▪ Decrease the weight of exams ▪ More exam support ▪ Delays in marking (SSAMs)
Communication	▪ Student feedback is acted upon ▪ Easy to contact teaching staff ▪ Tutorials are helpful	• Student feedback not acted upon • Unclear instructions for assignments
Support	▪ Staff supportive and friendly ▪ Great wellbeing support ▪ Great exam support	▪ Poor mental health support ▪ Inconsistent personal tutoring ▪ More career support

NSS

The National Student Survey (NSS) is a nation-wide survey of all final year undergraduate students studying at institutions across the UK and is managed by the Office for Students (OfS). The survey has run on annual basis since 2005. In 2020 the OfS undertook a significant review of the survey questions with an aim to refresh the NSS with questions that are more direct using positivity measure with a four-point scale to gain more accurate insight into the undergraduate student experience at UK universities.

The NSS 2025 questionnaire had 25 core questions which were grouped into six categories, or scale questions around themes like teaching, resources, academic support and there is a specific question about Students' Unions which is a part of the Student Voice category. Each of the six scale questions are composed of multiple questions which explore various elements of this theme in more detail. There were two additional questions included around mental health and freedom of speech, of which the second was offered only to students in England, and Royal Holloway included these questions in 2024.

Below is a table of the scores the Department received following the NSS 2025. This can help you inform areas that may working on and monitoring. This data can also inform the comments provided above. The term 'positivity measure' means the proportion of respondents who gave a positive answer

		2026	2025
Response Rate (%)		85	69
Questions (% of respondents Positivity Measure)			
1	How good are teaching staff at explaining things?	96.10	92.86
2	How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?	86.30	75
3	How often is the course intellectually stimulating?	92.20	88.10
4	How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?	89.60	81.93
5	To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?	87.00	84.52
6	How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?	92.90	84.52
7	To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?	92.20	80.95
8	To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?	86.40	70.24
9	How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?	88.30	80.72
10	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	75.30	73.81
11	How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	77.90	80.95
12	How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	68.20	71.43
13	How often have you received assessment feedback on time?	90.30	65.48
14	How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	68.20	67.86
15	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	91.60	90.48
16	How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	86.40	86.90
17	How well organised is your course?	90.90	91.90
18	How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?	85.90	90.40

19	How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	87.10	84.50
20	How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	85.30	84.70
21	How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?	86.80	93.20
22	To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?	90.30	85.10
23	To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?	88.30	84.90
24	How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?	80.50	79.70
25	How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?	73.30	77.90
26	How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?	81.20	77.80
27	During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions, and beliefs?	87.30	93

NSS Categories (% Positivity Measure)		2026	2025
1	The teaching on my course	91.10	84.52
2	Learning opportunities	89.40	80
3	Assessment and feedback	76.00	71.90
4	Academic support	89.00	86.69
5	Organisation and management	88.30	81.55
6	Learning resources	86.40	89.29
7	Student Voice	86.40	77.78
8	Students' Union	73.30	79.22
9	Mental wellbeing services	81.20	76.25
10	Freedom of expression	87.30	86.42

