Royal Holloway Students' Union
Department Rep Briefing

Department: English
For the Academic year: 2024-25
Date Prepared: July 2024
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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).

Students from this cohort experienced a marking and assessment boycott in their second year of study as well as disruptions from UCU strike action during their first and second year of study. These incidents could have an impact on the 2024 NSS scores.

Key Themes	Commentary	
	Things working well	**Areas for improvement**
Community	▪ Department feels like a family ▪ Good SU societies	▪ Not enough social opportunities in department ▪ Peer scheme doesn't work in the Humanities departments (UG SSAM)
Facilities	▪ Good study areas ▪ Library services are really good BUT poorly communicated to students (PG SSAM)	▪ Some Moodle pages are not organised well ▪ Not enough books in library, esp required texts
Teaching	▪ Good range of courses to choose from ▪ Staff are engaging, enthusiastic and knowledgeable	▪ Structure of the course ▪ Presumed knowledge that all first years come in knowing the same thing ▪ Quality of teaching isn't always good ▪ Workload too heavy with reading

Assessment	- Feedback returned on time and is detailed in some classes - More assessment ranges in third year	- UCU strikes and marking ban - Deadline stacking - Marking criteria not clear - Would like greater assessment ranges in years 1 and 2 - Questions for assessments and essays could be earlier - Marking discrepancies between departments for joint honours students - Feedback not always clear
Communication	- Staff encourage different perspectives on material - Good communication between staff and students	- Poor communication of what is expected at the start of each module - Poor advertisement of some modules on the course - Poor communication between departments for joint honours students
Support	- Academic and admin staff offer support - Opportunities to engage with industry experts for careers advice - Good support in third year for PG study - Good contact hours - Good experiences with the wellbeing team - Good experiences with personal tutors	- Would like more contact hours with academic staff - Not enough support for disabled students - Not enough support for commuter students - Would like more support on how to structure / write an essay - Mental health services at university could be improved - International students need more support with semantics of assignment submission (UG SSAM)

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 2024 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 2024 NSS. 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.

		2024	2023
Response Rate (%)		76	79
Questions (% Positivity Measure)			
1	How good are teaching staff at explaining things?	92.86	92.31
2	How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?	83.04	87.50
3	How often is the course intellectually stimulating?	89.29	91.35
4	How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?	84.82	81.73
5	To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?	85.71	78.85
6	How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?	66.96	86.41
7	To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?	87.39	83.50
8	To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?	70.54	72.12
9	How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?	73.87	75
10	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	67.86	75
11	How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	73.21	79.81
12	How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	79.46	82.52
13	How often have you received assessment feedback on time?	91.07	88.35
14	How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	72.32	74.04
15	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	86.61	87.50
16	How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	82.14	84.62
17	How well organised is your course?	88.39	79.81

18	How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?	77.57	71.29
19	How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	85.85	77.32
20	How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	91.74	90.29
21	How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?	85.86	75
22	To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?	88.18	77.88
23	To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?	78.18	73.79
24	How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?	57.80	52.43
25	How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?	71	64.58
26	How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?	70.37	56.86
27	During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions, and beliefs?	88.07	86.54

NSS Categories (% Positivity Measure)		2024	2023
1	The teaching on my course	87.50	88.22
2	Learning opportunities	76.79	79.13
3	Assessment and feedback	76.79	79.86
4	Academic support	84.38	86.06
5	Organisation and management	82.59	75.96
6	Learning resources	87.76	81.55
7	Student Voice	74.85	68.27
8	Students' Union	71	64.58
9	Mental wellbeing services	70.37	56.86
10	Freedom of expression	88.07	86.54