

Royal Holloway Students' Union Department Rep Briefing

Department: Law

For the Academic year: 2024-25

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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.

Key Themes	Commentary	
	Things working well	Areas for improvement
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Networking opportunities ▪ Extracurricular activities ▪ Inclusive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ International students do not feel valued or supported. Many also feel isolated (PG SSAM) ▪ Would like more social events for PG students (PG SSAM)
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work experience opportunities ▪ Moodle pages ▪ Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not enough space in the library ▪ Lecture recordings are not uploaded in a timely manner
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good mix of seminars and lectures ▪ Good course structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workload is challenging ▪ Pacing of course is rushed ▪ Some lectures are not engaging

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching staff are engaging and passionate about the subject ▪ Wide-range of modules ▪ Course is organised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of representation of BGM staff ▪ Would like options to attend lectures online, esp when dealing with extenuating circumstances ▪ Timetable clashes ▪ More contact hours ▪ Some lectures are extremely long with 70-100 slides ▪ Better timetables for commuter students ▪ PG students would like slides uploaded before lectures (PG SSAM) ▪ Part time students do not feel considered in the structuring of some courses (PG SSAM)
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assessments and assignments were challenging and reinforced concepts in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marking feedback is unclear and inconsistent ▪ Appeals process is confusing ▪ Instructions for assignments sometimes unclear ▪ Assessment weighting and organisation ▪ ECs guidelines not clear and unfair ▪ Marking mistakes by the examiner are negatively impacting students grades
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some academic staff listen to and act on feedback ▪ Teaching staff are easy to contact ▪ Assessment feedback was returned on time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timetable issues ▪ Poor communication from administrative team ▪ Poor communication between departments for joint honours students ▪ Poor communication about the strikes for commuter students ▪ More exam variety (online) ▪ Poor communication and delays around enrolment for certain modules (PG SSAM)

Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office hours clearly labelled and academic staff are supportive Dissertation writing workshop Good support from CeDAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More support for students undertaking a year in industry Poor financial and housing support More support for international students who need to apply for work visas during UCU strikes and marking bans More support from personal tutor Mental health support More support for joint honours students
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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 (%)		70	68
Questions (% Positivity Measure)			
1	How good are teaching staff at explaining things?	89.13	84.54
2	How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?	72.73	65.52
3	How often is the course intellectually stimulating?	80.43	82.13

4	How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?	74.64	74.23
5	To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?	79.27	72.51
6	How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?	81.16	75.43
7	To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?	80.43	72.76
8	To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?	76.81	68.04
9	How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?	74.91	68.62
10	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?	67.27	64.6
11	How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?	64.73	64.26
12	How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?	68.12	70.45
13	How often have you received assessment feedback on time?	86.18	87.59
14	How often does feedback help you to improve your work?	57.51	53.26
15	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?	85.09	73.68
16	How well have teaching staff supported your learning?	75.64	69.2
17	How well organised is your course?	80.80	73.2
18	How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?	70.26	64.71
19	How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?	84.47	76.17
20	How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?	88.93	87.23
21	How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?	83.97	81.62
22	To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?	83.76	72.03
23	To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?	71.91	52.14
24	How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?	60.61	39.36

25	How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?	72.55	67.3
26	How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?	72.69	67.97
27	During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions, and beliefs?	82.51	78.21

NSS Categories (% Positivity Measure)		2024	2023
1	The teaching on my course	79.20	76.6
2	Learning opportunities	78.46	71.43
3	Assessment and feedback	68.77	68.02
4	Academic support	80.43	71.55
5	Organisation and management	75.72	68.9
6	Learning resources	85.52	81.37
7	Student Voice	72.37	54.63
8	Students' Union	72.55	67.3
9	Mental wellbeing services	72.69	67.97
10	Freedom of expression	82.51	78.21