MINUTES

Students' Union Education Zone

4:30pm Thursday 7th November 2019

FT002

1. Welcome and Introduction

    Jenny convened the meeting and welcomed the attendees to the first Education Zone for the 19/20 academic year. The vast majority of attendees were academic reps as anticipated as this zone tends to be targeted towards them. There were 73 attendees.

2. To receive any items for Any other Business

    No other items were noted.

## Section A: Items for Discussion

3. **Expectations of University – This section** looked into what students expected from university and how people's course may differ to initial expectations.

- Out of 73 attendees, 32/73 claimed that university is exactly what they expected. 30/73 claimed that university is not what they expected and 9/73 claimed that university was completely not what they expected.
- From those in the middle, they claimed the lack of organisation on the university's behalf was an issue. They expected the university to be better organised, particularly bearing in mind the fees they are paying.
- Those who found university to be very different to what they expected listed a variety of reasons that this was the case. One was that they weren't aware of the number of placements. Another was that they received less support than they did at college and there was no real transition period. Another was the cost of participation in the SU. Another was the lack of interdisciplinary communication. The issue of extra cost of the course was a common point raised.
- The issue of a student's name change and the difficulty of doing so was also brought up,

- It was stated that academic skills were started too late on many courses with the School of Art and Design having particular issues with this. More needs to be done on the preparation for essay writing.

4. **Well-being and Transitions:** this section looked at whether students feel supported through university transitions and in regard to their wellbeing surrounding their Academic experiences, and how the university can improve student stress surrounding their course.

   - The following question was posed: "the university provide support for academic wellbeing to what extent do you agree with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely" and the answer was at 6.8.
   - The following question was posed: "I feel well supported through the university transition in relation to my studies to what extent do you agree with 1 being not at all and 10 being completely" and the answer was at 6.5.
   - The application and criteria for exceptional circumstances was a common theme in discussions. Students weren't clear what counted as evidence and spoke of the stress of having some evidence rejected and at times, difficulty in obtaining said evidence. There were difficulties at time in communicating with School Admin Units.
   - The issue of deadline clashes was a recurring one with various students reporting that at times two or even three modules had assignments due in at the same time. This did nothing to ease student concerns regarding their course and exacerbated stress.
   - More academic tutor meetings were frequently mentioned. Students made clear that even if their tutors couldn't offer mental health advice due to lack of training, they should be more adept at signposting to wellbeing. This is covered more in the next section.
   - Another recurring issue that students kept bringing up was for tutors to understand the unique pressures on students today. Financial commitments and worries about future employment beyond graduation in today's competitive job market push students to think more about extra curricular activities beyond their degree. Students claimed that some of their tutors didn't necessarily understand that and did not grasp the acute financial difficulties of students today,
   - The issue of more informal seminars and workshops was mentioned so students could have more sessions with their tutors in the run up to assessment periods and revise content.
   - Students noted that the transition between year groups could potentially be improved by the course offering more preparation for reading and dissertations and continuous guidance and support with academic writing.

5. **Personal Tutor:** This section surrounds the university personal tutor system, how it could be improved, and whether students feel supported

- The section started with a simple question asking students if they knew who their personal tutor is and 45/51 said whilst 6/51 said no.
- Students were asked if they feel well supported by their academic tutor and 33/55 said yes,  8/55 said no and 14/55 said a bit.
- With regards to how often students wanted to meet with their academic tutor, 14/59 wanted a weekly meet up, 29/59 wanted it monthly, 4/59 wanted a semesterly meet and 12/59 wanted to meet " when I feel it is necessary".
- When the open question was posed about how the personal tutor system could directly be improved, the answers were varied. The most common suggestions included more meetings, more visibility as to who they were, keeping the same tutor for the 3 years and better communication between schools from joint honours students. There were some positive comments about some tutors who are empathetic with their tutees though some comments highlighted how some did not necessarily understand the difficulty of student life in 2019.  The issue of an open door policy was also brought up repeatedly as some students wanted to know they could speak to their tutor even outside scheduled sessions. There were also suggestions of having a tutor who also taught the student too.

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**Section B: Open discussion**

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6. **Chair of School Dialogue:** This section allowed students to talk to their Chairs of School and give any departmental feedback from their cohort. The below is what has been recorded from the respective Chairs of School:

**Art and Design**

They feel that Phoenix is not a safe working space as students have no where to store their belongings. there have been cases this semester where things have been stolen. They made it very clear that it almost stops them wanting to come into University on their days off to do extra work in the event that something happens to their teams and that they can not concentrate while working due to being worried about their belongings. As well as they are not allowed to put their things in say a staff room or anything like that. This follows onto my next point as a lot of students said that there is not enough storage space and they all feel like that is an issue, not just with fine art students but across the board.

No disabled ramps in the Design Building. One student stated that it is having a tremendous impact on her work as she can't come into University everyday, because there is limited accessibility for the disabled.

Once again an issue with the software not being compatible with other programs. Such as, when working from home it would appear that their software is more/less up-to-date than the software used in uni. They want to know if it is possible to be able to have the option to downgrade a software so it can be compatible with the student software that they have been using elsewhere. If they have been using a less up-to-date software, that is.

All students at the Ed-Zone stated that they would love to have a water fountain back in the Design Building and in Phoenix. Purely because it is easier than having to rush to the canteen in a five minute break, which can sometimes mean they are late back or are unable to do anything else other than just fill their water bottles up. It would also be more assessable.

Security is an issue, they feel that people can just walk in and out of the Phoenix building and do not feel as though it is protected enough. They stated that they feel security should be more thorough when closing up at night, as they some student have been in the building working while they're closing up and security have not noticed them and nearly locked them in.

Fine art feel that first year reading should be more challenging to prepare you for second year, as they have stated they feel it is and has been a big jump.

Photography equipment, for example the darkroom. Students have stated that they do not feel they have been confidently shown how to use this kind of equipment. They feel tutors expect them to just know how to use it, it has also made some students hold back from asking for help or just not use the equipment in fear of damaging the equipment.

On a positive note students have stated that they enjoy being allowed to get on with their projects and having independent learning while still having a tutors in the room for input when needed.

Lastly, third year Graphic Design rep took it upon herself to find out what her course/year had to say on the matter of the ed-zone talk. She created a questionnaire and shared her findings.

University Transition and Expectations

Survey Results
This survey was completed by 21 students, which is around 60% of the class.

### Question 1
*"In your own experience, how much has the difficulty of work increased since 2nd year?"*
**Responses**
There has been a large increase in difficulty – 38.1%
There has been a small increase in difficulty – 33.3%
The difficulty of work is the same as in 2nd year – 9.5%
The work has become slightly easier – 14.3%
The work has become much easier – 4.8%

### Question 2
*"Do you think the workload is fair for the 3rd year of a undergraduate degree?"*
**Responses**
I think the workload is too much – 23.8%
I think the workload is just right – 76.2%
I think the workload isn't enough – 0%

### Question 3
*"Whilst in 2nd year, what did you expect of the work difficulty of the 3rd year?"*
**Responses**
I expected 3rd year to be harder – 52.4%
The 3rd year is the same difficulty as I expected – 33.3%
I expected the 3rd year to be easier – 14.3%

### Question 4
*"In your own experience, has there been any change in teaching quality between the 2nd and the 3rd year?"*
**Responses**
I believe the quality of teaching has improved – 33.3%
I believe the quality of teaching has stayed the same – 52.4%
I believe the quality of teaching has worsened – 14.3%

### Question 5
**"Please rate the quality of this area from 1-5.** Contact Hours - How easy it is to get in contact with your lecturers either in person or via email"
Responses
5 – 33.3%
4 – 38.1%
3 – 28.6%
2 – 0%
1 – 0%

### Question 6
*"Further comments on Contact Hours"*
**Responses**
1. Easy to get in contact and get questions answered quickly
2. Sometimes it is harder to find them outside of contact ours.
3. I love how they have an open door policy
4. Sometimes the answers are slow and the question I may have asked becomes irrelevant but otherwise great.
5. For me I don't contact them very often anyway but when I do want a specific tutor if I'm not in on one specific day I'm basically shafted.

## Question 7
"Please rate the quality of this area from 1-5. Timetabling - How often you're expected to be in, when and for how long?"
**Responses**
5 – 14.3%
4 – 33.3%
3 – 42.9%
2 – 9.5%
1 – 0%

## Question 8
"Further comments on Timetabling"
**Responses**
1. 1. Being in on both Monday's and Fridays really limits the work experience people can get as lots of places would prefer to have you in on a Friday so it doesn't effect their working week as much.
2. 2. Studio time should be optional. Hard to work inside the studio.
3. 3. I feel like timetable works quite well as we are encouraged to use the space when ever we want
4. 4. I like to work from home as I actually work better with less distractions from other students who may more often than not be making a lot of noise rather than working. Also it saves me money and a 2 hour plus journey back/forth.
5. 5.In one hand it's alright because I can get my career work done in the mid week but in the other hand I find myself not getting the uni work done because I done "have to be in" most of the time.

## Question 9
"Think back to before you started university. Please tick all the areas of the course which you have found to be very different from what you had imagined before enrolling."
**Responses**
The amount of work – 42.1%
The difficulty of work – 31.6%
The number of hours spent in university – 47.4%
The number of lecturers – 42.1%
Talks and visitors – 31.6%
Freedom allowed by friends – 52.6%
The number of modules – 21.1%

## Question 10
"If you ticked any of the boxes above (Question 9), do you believe the university was in any way responsible for the expectations which turned out to be very different? For example did you read something on the university website or were you told something at an open day that turned out to be inaccurate?"
**Responses**
Yes, the university was responsible for all of my misconceptions – 5.6%
Yes, the university was responsible for some of my misconceptions – 50%
No, the university was not responsible for any of my misconceptions – 33.3%
I did not tick any of the boxes above – 11.1%

## Question 11
Please elaborate on any of these big differences. what are they? How did they differ? What were the reasons for your expectations?
**Responses**

1. 1. I thought we would have more hand-on hours (for learning actual processes/content) and that that would feed into our work more and in turn we would do less briefs overall
2. 2. I expected there to be slightly more support if needed by the university
3. 3. The fact when applying we where told we wouldn't write a dissertation for this course. That we would be taught how to do different processes more, which hasn't happened really. Screen printing and letter press and that's about it.
4. 4. I expected to of had more contact hours and timetabled in more as well as more guest speakers.
5. 5. Other students past/present opinions. They are drastically different to mine. I feel like they feel the need to be negative about their workload despite the fact they're studying for a degree. Hard work is expected. So if anything other students opinions.
6. 6. For the difficulty, that was my own misconception, for hours, when I see the works "full time" I expect to be supplied with a timetable that reflects the same. Talks and visitors is more hit and miss, we always get them when we don't want them and when we would like a lecture on something we wait weeks for one.
7. 7. I don't think anyone was responsible, especially as the uni sorted out anything I needed at the time when I needed it

## Conclusion

Over half of students think there has been an increase in difficulty between 2nd and 3rd year. Generally, students believe the workload is right for the 3rd year of their course, but had expected it to be harder.

Students expected to spend more registered hours in university. They expected more time to be dedicated into learning skills related to the course.

Over half of the class had expectations which differed from the reality of the course in almost all of the listed areas. A majority believe that the university was responsible for their misconceptions to some degree.

## York Business School

- Timetable:
  - Commuting students would like the timetable to be more condensed so that they wouldn't have to spend money on commuting just for one lecture/seminar a day.
  - This term we have had a 9 am-8 pm day, which is over the normal 9 to 5 working hours and loads of people felt that they could not perform well in the lessons that were scheduled in the evening.
- Academics:
  - Students have felt that if they have not done this course as their undergraduate, they start with a handicap because they have not been taught how to write reports previously. (This was majorly said by Design MA students who are taking two marketing modules, Marketing students have a study skills module that teaches all this content) - This has been partially resolved by one lecturer re-structuring their lessons to include more writing advice.
  - One student felt that there should be an anonymisation process put in place for submitting assignments as they feel that if the lecturer knows who submitted a piece of work, they can be influenced by that.
- Apsire:

o Multiple students have expressed their curiosity for an Aspire card and they do not understand why Postgraduate students are not entitled to the Aspire card.

## Business School notes from Ed Zone

- Research Masters
- Admission Process
- Demanding on mental health
- Support in first year to emphasize 2nd and 3rd year
- Personal tutors aren't personable

•After we started 3rd year, a lot of meetings/advice/sessions were put on for us about graduate jobs. We felt this was too late as we needed to apply for the jobs pretty much as soon as we started 3rd year. It would've been helpful to have all the advice before summer so we could look through it and prepare over the summer. After all it's 4 months off we have enough time to do stuff like that

•In our seminars this year, the rooms we've been timetabled to aren't big enough and aren't the right layout for an accounting course. They're not in DG and they're mostly rooms with tables grouped in the middle which doesn't work well for our style of seminars where we have example questions and go through the answers at the front on the boards.

•However our lecturers have been a good at delivering messages to us about talks relating to our course and organising for accounting bodies and businesses to come in and chat with us. They stick around and are willing to chat at the end of lectures/seminars as well

•The team handling looking over CV's and cover letters seem to have too many to get through. Everyone's applying for jobs at the same time and they just don't have enough people/time to get back to everyone even though we have deadlines for jobs we want to apply for but need our CV's/cover letters checking first. It's frustrating because I know it's just simply because there are too many to get through for the whole university. Maybe a team per school (eg business school) could work?

•Business School talks are for accounting students, marketing students and business students. Although we're all business degrees we have found that our style for applying for jobs are very different for accounting. For example marketing students benefit from running blogs and having an online presence whereas accounting students maybe don't.

Oghenero (actually not sure how to spell his name sorry)- they said there's a language barrier and it's hard to understand what he's saying. Also that he doesn't explain more than what's on the PowerPoint. They also said that he's not engaging and didn't explain the assignment brief.

I also have a PhD student for my management and leadership seminar and again it is hard to understand him and hardly anyone turns up. For the past 2 weeks only me and one other person have turned up- I think he plays a big part in this and it is also 5.30-7.30 on a Thursday night so this is probably a reason too.

## Humanities, Religion and Philosophy

DROP IN

- **Rep Geography Y1:**

Expectations/Transition:

\+        Overall settling into uni has been good as the atmosphere is good/small which has helped when moving from a small school/college

**Other:**

- 'Mapping' Module could use more explanation – this does depend on the person as some do feel comfortable talking to lectures whilst others do not


- **Rep Creative Writing + English Lit Y1:**

Expectations/Transition:

\+        Moving to uni is better thought

\+        Course content is challenging enough (but not over their heads)

**Communication/Signposting:**

\+        Tutors are all good and helpful and can go to see them when not course related (feel can always go to them)

- Need more signposting and communication
- Would be useful to have more about moodle over summer – as was downplayed the importance of going onto moodle within first few weeks when could have accessed it all beforehand (or thought about it)

\+        Generally all positive with CW – despite small struggle with 'intro into Lit' module as no communication as to why is necessary to take

+/-        Some lecturers are too loose with personal/political opinions and for mature student was normal for them but for 18/on age student was too much of a shock/contrast from school teaching


- **Reps Human Geog. Y1:**

Expectations/Transition:

\+        Lots of independent study but is as expected when coming to uni

**Course Structure:**

- Course content trickles and left with a week to write essay after finally getting all taught material – could do with more intensive theory at start for more time to write
- Would like examples of past essays etc to understand the expectations
- All trips mandatory and placed right before assessment with little time to do (or lessons focusing on unpacking briefs were don't day before trip, then essay due day or so after trip)

- **<u>Stu – History Y2:</u>**

\+         Interesting content now delivered from choosing modules

- **<u>Rep Human Geog. Y3:</u>**

**Class/seminar:**

- Lengthy unreasonable amount of reading for third year results in no one doing it, but for those who do the reading are pulling weight of entire group/class in seminar discussions
- Whole class stressed from dissertations etc – general feeling of overwhelming
- Slow processes with ethics forms for individuals.
- Consistency in timetable isn't great – changes days at a time .

        **<u>Rep Environmental Geog Y3:</u>**
        **Expectations/Transition:**

\+         Not much different from second year

\+         Lots of help for dissertation – comfortable with lecturers and all are happy with the tutors they have

**Course:**

\-         More explanation is needed in H Geog for E Geog students as very theory/sociological heavy when E Geog are used to science

\-         Reading for above is also difficult when covers the social side of module and then have a heavy lecture on top without unpacking reading

\-/+       Class structure different from last year but that's fine – 3 hour lessons in blocks but manageable with breaks and lax on food etc

\-         No consistency in timetable again for Geog

- **<u>Rep + Stu English Lit Y3:</u>**

**Expectation/Transition:**

\+         Feeling very supported throughout course – no need to go out of way for support but further support is there for those who need is and is well signposted within the dept.

\+         Generally good going into 3rd year – 4 week meetings are helpful and all approve

**Other:**

- Room size for 'Victorian Novel' – too small when attendance is 100%
- Room changes are often
- "On Loan" Post-Grad research lecturer is very patronising without meaning to be. Taught PEEL paras, all surface level knowledge/teaching – Experimental Century module **(Brought up by number of reps)**
- **Follow on:** New module has no cover sheet / no marking grid/criteria / no Learning Outcomes – a generally difficult module because of this

- **<u>Rep TRS/RPE Y3:</u>**

- Overriding opinions of lectures can be too heavy/personal which have negative impact on students mentality towards modules – difficult to engage with lecturers when it is their clear opinion/speciality in field
+ Despite this lecturers are usually very approachable when need be

- Updating Moodle pages more often is needed
+ Dissertation workshops are helpful – especially ILS refresh – very supported

- No consistent timetable for times/rooms though days are usually the same
- Need more guidance in assessments
- Difficulty keeping up with lecturers speed when they have not been taught by then beforehand – feel like can't stop/pause lecture to ask
- Policy in recording seminars needs to be addressed – MANY feel uncomfortable when they are recorded without consent during seminars (specifically ethics centred) when personal opinions/ stories and backgrounds are shared and are then captured in recording without consent (all understand the need for recording for some students but are aware there is no consent)
- Lecturers need refreshing on gender changes for students – as initially have been told but have continued to mis-gender students (accidentally or not is still hurtful)

Sent from Rep:

"Positives

A fair amount of support available during lectures and after, as well as additional support that can be accessed outside of lecture times – TRS

Advised in advance of the stress of third year but still stressed – RPE

Feminist Ethics is good because the lecturer is thorough with content and with assignment titles – RPE

Preference over splits in assignment (i.e. two 50% ones) - RPE

Negatives

Timetable changes is adding to stress – RPE, TRS

Assignment guidance – Globalisation

Dissertation sessions, feel like they should be fewer (maybe every other week) just to avoid repetition and disengaging students – RPE, TRS"

### English Lit:

- Very supportive with weekly meetings and thought this could be passed onto different departments to take note
- Seminar and tutors all fine
- Admin could be better but they're okay – 'Mel' got a shout out for being amazing
- Exceptional circumstances are a hassle and there could be more help

School wide the reps agreed that exceptional circumstances is too strict with what criteria they need for it – as exceptional circumstances almost always will be something sprung onto a

student and not something they can predict – otherwise would have worked studies around it anyway.

There is also no help for those with ongoing health issues which flare up randomly and therefore cannot predict when it will happen and need to apply for exceptional circumstances – a hassle to re-explain their health every time to someone new.

### RPE/TRS Y3:

- Personal opinions come up too much by some lecturers in lectures when not seminar discussions
- Some modules don't feel relevant in that they focus too much on wider context of things and don't focus on assessment requirements when they are unclear
- Feel like it can get awkward when its clear in class/seminar that a lecturer prefers certain students/doesn't like certain ones

### JH Hist + H. Geog: (student, not rep)

- Too much reading behind the scenes on theory and not taught the theory in lesson, learning the bulk of the module behind the scenes makes it difficult
- A lot of lessons are student led which makes it difficult to get good content etc – feel like their paying to teach themselves
- The revalidation of History has had no communication wit Geog and some of the module changes can affect
  - o Having to get modules checked which cross over with Human Geog and History
  - o Personifies the lack of communication between joint honour degrees
  - o Feels like they have a foot in each degree and their body is the link – when they shouldn't have to exert themselves when uni should be better at creating that bridge
  - o Need staff for JH generally to communicate with them?
  - o No reps for JH – came as a student and only one on their course
  - o No talk between history reps and geog reps etc when there are cross over degrees
  - o Should there be overall reps for one whole degree?

### RPE Y2:

- Everyone had same academic tutor in first year and now they had to reallocate selves to tutors – should have the same tutor throughout
- Awkward to have a tutor when they don't get on with them as a lecturer (in this instance, student had skipped persons lectures all first year and has since been reallocated as their tutor in 2nd year)
- Potentially have a random tutor for first year and then write down preferred three tutors when reach 2nd year and know them, then are reasonably allocated to one they hopefully get on with better?

**School Wide** – thinks academic tutors should get more training in wellbeing

Opposed by one **EL Y3** – who said academic tutors shouldn't have to take the brunt of everything going on in someone's life and should instead point them to wellbeing

Suggested a named person in SAU to talk to about academic stress which remains course related but isn't one of the lectures if that feels too personal talking about their own module

### H Geog + Hist:

- Should have lecturers point out in week one where all the wellbeing is and signpost better

### MA Contemp. Lit Rep: (From Note)

### Introduction for Post-Grad students:

- Majority of the materials/emails provided at induction seem to be geared towards continuing students rather than mature students or students coming from other universities.
    o Could be an intro into YSJ session for PG students on moodle – showing university resources explained – library system etc
- When making cafes for PG students etc – should actually ask via poll for students and when people are free as most are working in the morning
+ School specific resources are good – practise could be something to consider – especially for mature students (e.g. students who hasn't been in formal education for 20+ years)

    ^ They are aware tutors can help with this but suggest a timetabled session/introduction would probably encourage learners to actively get support – Rep has found themselves helping other students on a number of occasions for assignments
- Overall, MA has been well taught so far and everyone seems largely positive about the course and modules. Lecturers are providing high quality primary and secondary sources.

### Science and Technology

During the discussion with my reps, we discussed about the logistics of how feedback would be passed through, especially through the two schools. We found that creating a Facebook group would be useful as I only had 3 reps attend who all seemed to be on board reps. We thought this would be good, as it would mean that we could have frequent communication and it would be a good space to spread communications. Following the meeting, I have asked for feedback to be gained for the next Ed Zone and have reassured them to pass feedback through before then too, so any changes can start to be made if required. The reps seem very keen to make a change and even if I have 3 on board reps, I feel reassured that they will be good and will actively want to make positive changes.

### Performance and Media Production

Most of the academic reps present were Music students. They made reference to the issue of timetabling – they have between 10-15 hours a week but felt it was too spread out when it could be more condensed. There were concerns about a potential guest lecturer – he had been invited last year and had allegedly made sexist remarks such as "why are there no great female composers" and there was a fear he would return. There was feedback in that some lecturers seems disorganised in their approach to teaching. There was also some criticism of the lecture spaces. There was no real provision for making notes in lectures as most of them were held in classes with no fold out desks and little room to write.

**Section C: Any other business**

There was nothing of note in this section.

**Date of next meeting:**

**Monday 25th of November**

**Expectations of University –** looking into what you expected from university and how people's course may differ to initial expectations