

STUDENT EDUCATION ZONE

| MINUTES



Student Education Zone

Monday 8th November 2021, 6pm

FT/002

Members in attendance:

28 individuals were in attendance

Chair:

Aimee Yeoman, President of Education (PE)

YSJSU Officers/Staff:

Jamie Andrews, President of the Students' Union (PSU)

Chris Smith, President of Wellbeing and Diversity (PWD)

Zaki Kaf Al-Ghazal – Voice and Insight Coordinator (ZK)

Christopher Prior – Advice Coordinator (CP)

Grace Pheasey – Governance and Democracy Assistant

Others:

Susan Orr – Pro Vice Chancellor: Learning & Teaching (SO)

Apologies:

None recorded.

1. Welcome and Introductions:

PE convened the meeting and welcomed the attendees to the first Education Zone for the 21/22 Academic Year. There were **28 attendees**, including three Chairs of School and some Academic Reps.

Questions were posed by Aimee using Mentimeter regarding the return to campus and the University's in-person teaching approach. This zone was held to discuss student perspectives on the in-person teaching approach that the university has taken.

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Section A: Items for Discussion

A Mentimeter Survey was designed by PE to ask a set of questions for the attendees. The questions and answers are as follows:

1. With regard to learning and teaching of your degree specifically, how have you found the return to full on-campus teaching?

Participants gave a mixed response. Many of the participants were returning students and welcomed the return to campus and face-to-face interaction. Mixed responses regarding COVID-19 measures, with some students reporting size of rooms for classes and mask wearing.

Majority of students reported no mask wearing in lectures. Some attendees who wore glasses reported a lack of concentration when wearing a mask too.

1.1 Lecture Recording and Audio Quality

A 3rd year Law student reported issues with audio quality for recorded lectures. AY acknowledged this issue and noted that clip of mics for Lecturers are arriving soon. SO acknowledged recordings of lectures is in the early stages of a rollout and the patience of students during this time is appreciated. SO emphasised that recorded lectures are a supplement of face-to-face teaching as the University is taking an in-person approach.

2. Do you feel supported by academic staff? i.e. are they understanding of any anxieties, are in person tutorials readily available?

Mixed responses from attendees, this varied between subjects and level of study:

“The staff so far have been really nice and if I have any problems I can just drop them an email”

“Academic staff have been quite good, especially for tutorials” (Psychology, 3rd year)

“Although I feel like we are free to speak with our lecturers about concerns, it seems there’s a lot of constraints when it comes to actually being able to help or adjust things”

The degree structure of the Foundation year courses was also discussed. Language and Film Studies students reported that the Foundation year was not tailored to Language students from within Liberal Arts. There was a suggestion that general knowledge on politics and history was being taught with no content on language support.

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3. Do you feel safe and conformable during your lectures? i.e. room capacity, COVID mitigations...

Majority of attendees reported they felt safe on campus, but some did feel anxious about social distancing measures when room bookings exceeded capacity. Temple Hall was used as an example of having maximum capacity (204 students), this was seen with Language and Linguistics attendees.

Attendees reported mixed messaging from Academics regarding illness. Attendees noted the message of 'stay at home if you feel unwell' sometimes contrasted how Lecturers viewed absence. Attendees also discussed workload and catching up on missed content, the discussion of online teaching reoccurred. The use of online collaborative documents was also raised, particularly for seminar tasks.

"Safe and comfortable but still worried about COVID still"

"When tutors ask people to wear masks but its usually only when prompted"

4. Do you feel that teaching and learning on your degree is of a high standard? i.e. do you feel academically challenged, engaged...

There was a mixed response between attendees and the subjects studied. Attendees from the School of Humanities thought the course was academically challenging. This was also felt by those from York Business School. The engagement of learning content also received mixed views, with preferences for online teaching and recorded lectures. ZK asked attendees if students felt engaged when accessing literature. This sparked discussions on accessibility of reading and more ways to digest and engage with the material.

Attendees from York Business School felt that soft skills were a key component of the course structure and this sometimes fell short of real-life application of those skills. Attendees from this School suggested clearly signposting Library services.

"I do feel academically challenged. But I find the communication of the course in some areas to be vague and poor".

"Lecturers are always engaging and the themes discussed are always academically challenging, I often leave seminars feeling accomplished".

5. What more could be done to support you when studying on campus? i.e. are study spaces suitable, library resources easily accessible?

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Quite a few of the attendees reported of lack space in areas like the Library and Holgate. Some attendees also noted limited space for group discussion or project work. This also prompted discussion regarding charging units/stands in the Library for laptop charging. Some attendees reported accessibility concerns, in particularly the Holgate staircase. Attendees also raised concerns about practising COVID measures when study areas are busy. Some attendees reported the delayed communication with online tech support services.

“more access, space in library it’s always full”

“library resources are very accessible”

“room bookings are quite sparce at the moment, will be hopefully be easier with the completion of the new building”

After hours shared study spaces – PE gave the suggestion of using the second-floor teaching spaces as after hour study spaces. This would be allocated to certain Schools or programmes with access to once a week. The attendees present agreed this would be a good idea.

6. Are digital learning provisions useful when studying? i.e. is Moodle helpful, digital resources...

Majority of attendees think the digital learning positions are useful. There was a mixed response regarding Moodle, some attendees reported that Moodle was used inconsistently between Lecturers (either using Moodle or Microsoft Teams).

When asked whether attendees received instructions on how to access digital provisions, 16 attendees reported they were given a session, 5 of those who attended said it was useful.

One attendee from York Business school noted the messaging and presence on the existence of digital learning tools and provisions could be enhanced.

The inspired discussions around Mentimeter, which was common amongst attendees who reported that Lecturers are using it in seminars for increased interaction. The attendees welcomed the use of Mentimeter and the anonymity of submitting answers to questions without feeling judged. There was emphasis that Mentimeter should be used more frequently.

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7. Are you aware of the academic support services on offer for all YSJ students?

Majority of attendees said yes, some students said no and would like there to be more awareness of what services are available to students. Some students reported the need for more wellbeing and disability services to be signposted.

“Yes, but it would help to have these made aware of a bit more”

“More support for mental health issues and disabilities”

b) If so, have you used these, how were they?

Majority of attendees would talk to their Lecturer as the first port of call, the Library was outlined as a well-known service. When asked if the attendees knew about the Academic Advice Service at the Students’ Union, only 3 attendees did.

“access to academic tutors and study support are good”

“I know of library and found it useful. Other than that, I have not been told of any other places”

c) If not, how can we advertise these better?

Majority of attendees advised that talks should be given by their Academic Tutors or Lecturers to signpost these services. Others suggested the use of social media or posters. Few students suggested email after several attendees stated they did not check emails regularly.

When asked if the attendees knew how to book a room, nearly all attendees said yes.

8. Generally, how do you feel about the year ahead with a return to on-campus teaching?

Majority of attendees felt excited about in-person teaching, both from an academic and social aspect. Some students noted anxieties towards COVID measures, welcoming a mask mandate to make sure guidelines are being followed by students.

“very positive, hopefully this is it now and there will be no going back”

“good but could be blended to avoid covid spread”

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“I’d rather not be on campus – guidelines are not being followed by students”

Section B: Other Items for Discussion

ED opened the floor for general questions. *An attendee asked “I never get told who Academic Reps are, how do I find out?”*. ZK responded that Academic Staff will be in contact to inform students and Chairs of School will also be in touch to contact Reps from their School.

Section C: Any Other Business

None