Academic Quality Report 4: Parity of Experience

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Foreword

TSDSU is proud to present the fourth Academic Quality Report, which continues to be one of our most important pieces of work. We have been continuously impressed by the University's readiness to proactively respond to our findings and recommendations each year, and are excited to keep up the momentum, continuing to work in close partnership to enhance the student experience across the institution. In light of recent structural changes and an institutional emphasis on place-making, this year we have decided to focus our research on the parity of academic experiences across UWTSD's student body.

UWTSD has positioned itself as a diverse and varied institution - a multiversity - which has a distinctive offer across three main campuses in Wales and further afield, at outreach centres and its satellite campuses. We recognise that this position, alongside its vocational portfolio, means that as an institution it plays an important role in removing barriers to participation and providing opportunities to students from all walks of life, and for some right in the heart of their community. As a Students' Union, we are very proud to support this excellent work, and as our role as a critical friend, we want to ensure the University is responsive to the needs of this ever-changing student body.

In the chapters that follow, we outline trends we have identified through the circulation of our 2019/20 Big SU Survey and in-class activity with student groups across UWTSD. We have identified areas where students feel disadvantaged or require access to additional resources, and believe that in addressing these areas,

a more consistent student experience can be achieved, improving student satisfaction across the board.

We are excited to present this body of work to the University, but also feel it's important to acknowledge the unprecedented circumstances in which we're sharing it; during a pandemic and a period of tremendous stress and uncertainty. We have been endlessly impressed by the readiness and rigor with which the University has adapted to the situation that's unfolding. We have observed the hard work of both Professional and Academic staff, who have done an excellent job in moving to an online delivery, whilst still providing students with a supportive, high quality experience. We would like to use this as an opportunity to thank the UWTSD community for all they've done for students over this difficult time.

We continue to view the Academic Quality Report as one of the successful signs of our partnership, and look forward to working collaboratively, implementing these positive changes over the next academic year.

Thank you,
Elis, Becky & Martha

Chapter 1: AQR 1, 2 & 3 Outcome and Recommendations

As a Students' Union, we are delighted with the progress made against the recommendations of our past Academic Quality Reports. The table below gives insight to our original recommendations, the University's response, and our current view on their implementation across the institution. This year we have decided to close off several of our past recommendations as we are satisfied that they have been addressed.

AQR 1: Hidden Course Costs

1 a, b & c

Recommendations 1a, b and c saw that the University should make adjustments to its promotional material, giving better clarity of the additional costs students would incur throughout their studies. They also ensured that this information should be included in course-level promotional material, and that additional course costs be assessed as part of the programme development process.

SU Response:
Considerable work has been done since our first AQR on the provision of information to students related to hidden course costs. We are satisfied that since AQR 3, the University have been responsive and that including this information in marketing collateral and on the website has been embedded.

We are pleased to close this recommendation, but will continue our annual audit of course cost statements and report our findings to the Student Experience Committee to ensure continuous progress.

2a & b

We asked that the University investigate its current offering of bursaries and look to widen its current offer, targeting students with higher additional course costs such as Art programmes, Outdoor Education, and students on Placement.

SU Response:
We are happy that this recommendation has been met and look forward to continuing in meaningful consultation with the University during its bursary review process.

3a & b

a. Fully review the current associated costs of study faced by students, using the HEFCW categorisation.

b. Develop an action plan in concert with the Students' Union on how best to ensure the burden of these costs is most equitably shared.

University Response (April 2020):
An analysis of PV2a forms will be completed this summer which will be used to inform bursaries and guidance.

SU Response:
Once analysis of PV2a forms has been completed, we will happily work with the University to develop the work in this area. We would anticipate that this work will be ready for the start of the 2020/21 academic year. As per AQR 3, we would be supportive of the creation of a working group to make recommendations.

AQR 2: Course Organisation and Communication

AQR 2.1

Summary:
We advised that the University should seek to use a different communication tool to e-mail for the transmission of the most important messages to its students.

SU Response:
We are very pleased with the progress made against this

recommendation, the development of the Student Hwb and Hwb app. We are pleased to close this recommendation.

AQR 2.2

That the implementation of the new Cancelled, Postponed and Rescheduled Class Policy is regularly monitored for effectiveness and consistency.

SU Response:
We are grateful that updates on the effectiveness and consistency of this policy now feeds into Student Experience Committee. We are happy to close the recommendation.

AQR 2.3

That the University commit to issuing accurate timetables to all students at least a week before teaching starts in each term, and that this commitment is added to the Student Charter, monitored and reported to the appropriate University committee.

University Response (April 2020):
Guidelines in relation to timetables to be agreed in advance of the 2020/21 academic year.

SU Response:
Although we understand progress has been made in this area, and a commitment has been added to the Student Charter, this remains an area of dissatisfaction for many students. Data gathered from our Welcome survey at the beginning of this academic year, where we heeded 995 responses, indicated that 26% of respondents had received their timetables a less than a week before teaching. 10% had received their timetables less than two days before teaching started, and 8% after teaching had started. 18% of respondents had not yet received an accurate timetable at the time they'd completed the survey.

We will continue to review the timetabling process through the circulation of our Welcome survey, and are interested in comparing results following the introduction of guidelines in advance of the 2020/21 academic year.

The Students' Union will happily work with the University in the co-creation of these guidelines.

AQR 2.4

That the University review the enrolment process (both for new and returning students) in order to ensure that the information is accurate and timely and that the process is effective and accessible.

University response (April 2020):
Further work on enhancing enrolment experiences is being done in preparation for the 2020/21 academic year. E.g. online enrolment events are planned to assist students with enrolling and applying for funding. This is part of a review of induction arrangements.

SU Response:
We recognise that a lot of work has been focused in this area since AQR 2, however are keen to closely monitor this given its importance to the 'Security' level of the Student Hierarchy of Needs.

AQR 2.5

That the enrolment process should be designed around the student, not around the administrative unit structure of the University. Consideration should be given to providing additional seasonal resource to act as a central, proactive, point of contact to resolve enrolment issues.

University Response (April 2020):
See above re the enrolment events to provide additional support to students.

Financial information has been reviewed and enhanced information will be included in the packs sent to new students.

SU Response:
The introduction of Hwb has been an excellent and welcome development, and the latest University response is very encouraging, however we'd like to keep this recommendation open as an area for continued improvement.

AQR 2.6

For the University to monitor and capture issues with enrolment on an annual basis for the purposes of review and development.

SU Response:
We understand that this is already happening, and would like to keep the recommendation open as an area for continued development. The Students' Union would like to continue to help review the process on an annual basis as part of the normal cycle of business.

AQR 2.7

That the University completes the 2017-18 audit of 'VLE Base-line standards' and uses the information to enhance usage and engagement, solves access issues and identifies training and development needs.

University response (April 2020):
The University is engaged in an online learning project to establish a digital framework and continue to upskill staff in digital skills, to enhance quality of teaching offered online and through online platforms, to increase access to online resources.

SU Response:
As a Students' Union we are delighted with the improvements in this area, and the effort that's been made to embed digital literacy skills in staff development. We are interested to observe further progress in this area given the temporary shift to an online-only delivery.

AQR 2.8

That the VLE Base-line standards should be promoted to, and accessible by, students in order to establish expectation.

University response (April 2020):
We are reviewing baseline standards as part of the development of a new digital framework and will publish expectations for students around online learning prior to the 2020/21 academic year. A link will be put in the Student Charter.

SU Response:
We are pleased to hear about this development, and look forward to seeing the standards being made available to students in the Student Charter. We would like to keep this recommendation open for the time being, and will review further progress in our next report.

AQR 2.9

That teaching staff are asked to sign up to these standards in a similar way as students are required to promise to engage and access the platform.

University response (April 2020):
We will work with Institutes to promote the online resource hub, resources available and expectations.

SU Response:
We welcome the promotion of these standards to staff, but feel that the introduction of more accountability in this area would benefit student satisfaction. We will review once the standards have been added to the Student Charter.

AQR 2.10

Ensure that placement allocation and communication is accurate and timely.

University response (April 2020):
Monitoring of good practice in relation to placements was planned for this semester but has not been able to happen because of Covid-19 as all placement activity was ceased. We will continue to consider this during the 2020/21 academic year and are reviewing the associated chapter of the Academic Quality Handbook.

SU Response:
We would like to work with the University to consider an appropriate time commitment between informing students of their given placement and starting their first day. Ideally, we would like this recommendation to correspond with guidelines for timetabling.

We understand the disruptions caused by Covid-19, and look forward to continuing to work closely with the University on matters of placement allocation and communication in the next academic year.

AQR 3: Student Mental Health

AQR 3.1

The University continues to roll out mental health first aid training for front-line staff and works with the Students' Union to identify staff for future waves of training. The Students' Union would particularly like to see the mental health training form part of Personal Tutor training.

University response (April 2020):
Next tranche of mental health first aid training go be rolled out shortly as part of the HEFCW bid. Coordinator for HFECW bid has been appointed.

Compulsory online mental health training module rolled out to all staff and uptake monitored centrally.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy is currently being developed, in close liaison with the SU and other key stakeholders. Deadline for completion 26 June (new HEFCW deadline because of the Covid-19 crisis).

I-Act training for managers rolled out during the first term of 2019/20.

SU Response:
The Students' Union are grateful for the progress made in this area. Since uptake in the training is centrally monitored, we would be interested to hear about how this data is used, and if areas where there is lower uptake are proactively addressed by the University (institute, gender, pay grade, campus, etc.).

Since this training is compulsory, we would like confirmation that regular reminders are sent to staff who have not completed their mental health training module.

AQR 3.2

The Students' Union sees the personal tutor system as integral to early identification of issues and an effective way for students to easily access specialist support services. The SU believe that all students should have a personal tutor and should have a meeting with their personal tutor within the first month of their studies.

University response (April 2020):
This work is ongoing and is part of an overall systemic approach to enhance the supportive framework for students (particularly in relation to crisis and difficulties). It has been agreed that a timeline of actions will be developed by the 1st of June (new deadline because of Covid-19).

SU Response:
We look forward to working closely with the University when this timeline of activity is developed.

AQR 3.3

Early disclosure of mental health problems is paramount, the University should improve the publicity surrounding disclosure and detailing the support available. This should be prioritised prior to entry but additionally flagged consistently throughout.

University response (April 2020):
Further work has been undertaken to enhance the process of assessing the needs of applicants declaring mental health difficulties.

Disclosure data, as published in the University Annual Equality Report, is in place and further data work will be undertaken.

The Mental Health Coms plan will be reviewed.

SU Response:
We understand that first disclosure guidelines have been written for staff, and we would like to see these more actively promoted. Campaigns directed at students and staff to promote early disclosure and reduce stigma will also be welcomed over the next academic year. We recognise the progress that's been made surrounding the assessment of applicants this year, and would like to thank the University for this activity. This is an area in which we'd like to see continuous progression.

We recognise that due to current lockdown that there are limitations to the support the University can offer to new students who would usually be in receipt of DSA. We understand that this is somewhat outside of the University's control, but we consider this a priority issue. We would like to see students offered some form of support in the interim.

AQR 3.4

The link between academic Institutes, Student Hubs and Professional Services is integral to supporting positive student mental health and to ensure suitable referral and support structures are in place. The development of mechanisms to track and flag support across the institution is viewed as important as these may be too reliant on individuals at present.

University response (April 2020):
This is part of the systemic work indicated in relation to recommendation 2. A detailed plan and timeline will be developed by the 1st of June (new deadline because of Covid-19 crisis).

SU Response:
As above, we look forward to supporting with these developments once the timeline has been established.

AQR 3.5

The widening of PASS or the creation of a mental health peer buddy scheme might be considered. The Students' Union would be interested in working with the University on a project of this nature.

University response (April 2020):
A peer mentoring role has been created and is currently being piloted by IMH.

The SU have received funding for mentoring training as part of the HEFCW Connect bid. There has been a good level of interest from students for this training.

Student Services are currently reviewing the PASS scheme and activity in relation to this scheme on different campuses.

SU Response:
The introduction of a peer mentoring role in IMH is a promising development, and we are interested in hearing more about the success of this pilot. We would like to work with the University on turning this into a wider project, offering the opportunity to students across all institutes.

AQR 3.6

That time be built into each student's schedule to allow for activity to promote their health and well-being, this could include volunteering, part-time work, childcare, student-led activities or individual academic research. These activities should be celebrated and the time presented as important.

University response (April 2020):
Agreed that key will be the focused and holistic promotion of opportunities available for students. A key next milestone for this will be the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

SU Response:
We welcome to focused and holistic promotion of opportunities to students. Given the commitment to develop activity to promote health and well-being through one of the HEFCW bids, we will review progress in this area over the next academic year.

We would like additional consideration to be taken when the timetabling guidelines are produced in preparation for the next academic year.

AQR 3.7

For the University and the Students' Union to further explore the specific mental health needs of students from liberation backgrounds and protected characteristics.

University response (April 2020):
Data gathering is key here to make informed decisions about mental health needs for specific groups. The data is currently not available, but this will be part of the actions agreed in the new Strategic Equality Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

SU Response:
We understand that application data is currently used to inform the University's annual reporting on equality and diversity. We would like to see the University identify any areas where additional data collection streams can be monitored and utilised to give a more robust representation of the diversity of the institution. For example, on MyTSD. We find it particularly important to monitor changes to the ways in which students identify and offer support that is tailored to them.

We continue to view this as an important piece of work, and will support with moving it forward when this data is available.

AQR 3.8

To review the current academic regulations, policies and procedures to judge whether they are fit-for-purpose in terms of mental health. We would like specifically to see processes such as fitness to practice and fitness to study speeded up and made more student friendly. Reviewing the assessment turn-around times to ensure that they are relevant for each cohort is also important – students on block teaching (for example) are already on their next assessment before they have their feedback from their last piece of work (under the 20 day feedback model) – this would also be important for students studying in Birmingham and London.

University response (April 2020):
New Support for Study Policy approved in March 2020 by the Student Experience Committee. This includes further strengthening of local first stage approaches. A Third Party Involvement Procedures has also been approved by the Student Experience Committee in March. The Student Emergency Contact Policy was rolled out in February 2020.

SU Response:
As a Students' Union we are pleased with the changes made to the Fitness to Study policy this year. We believe that it takes a more supportive approach, and presents as more 'student friendly'. We also welcome the introduction of Student Emergency Contact Policy, and would like to commend the University on these positive developments.

Chapter 2: Parity of Experience

Our decision to investigate parity of experience this year was based on the ever-changing landscape of the Higher Education sector. It is well known that there has been an increase in students wishing to fit their studies around other commitments and students returning to education after long periods of time, and UWTSD is no exception. The increased delivery of flexible courses at satellite campuses in Birmingham and London and at outreach centers, in addition to a focus on upskilling students through vocational courses, is a welcome shift. Furthermore, we have observed the ways in which offering students the opportunity to explore part-time, blended and distance learning pathways into Higher Education can be transformative and empowering. However as a Students' Union, we feel there should be an effort to introduce better parity in these areas, to ensure consistency and increased student satisfaction. We believe that while innovation and flexibility are crucial, equity is also imperative.

It is important to note from the outset, that we recognise students do not all want the same experiences, and therefore do not need access to exactly the same facilities and resources. For example, we realise the intent behind the decision to undertake part-time study as a distance learner may be different to the decision of a student applying for a course and on-campus accommodation after completing their A Levels. It is likely that they might not want or need the same things, but they should have equal opportunities and access to the support they need to thrive. As such, the purpose of AQR 4 is not to measure whether experiences at one location are the same as another, but is instead to identify if some student groups are unfairly disadvantaged in comparison to others.

Our research was largely informed by analysis of in-class activity and data collected through our Big SU Survey, which was completed by 841 students across all UWTSD campuses. Data from NSS, UKES and PTES surveys and results from the Resources Survey was also used to inform the direction of our research. A casework review was conducted to help identify patterns in student experiences, and feedback from Student Representatives was collected to give a balance of qualitative and quantitative insights. We have used these tools to research at a whole-University, institute and campus level, in addition to focusing on students on different modes and levels of study, and students from traditionally underrepresented groups.

Results: Demographics

The Big SU Survey was shared with all students in November 2019 and we collected 841 responses, tripling the engagement from previous years. Swansea, Carmarthen, Lampeter, Cardiff and Birmingham campuses heeded a significant response, with a smaller response from London and Distance Learning students. The survey was presented and promoted bilingually, and we received responses in both Welsh and English.

Overall Response Rate by Campus

- 43% of respondents were from Swansea

- 19% were from Carmarthen

- 13% were from Lampeter

- Birmingham students made up 12% of our respondents

- Cardiff 6%

- London 2%

- 5% of respondents were distance learners.

- Swansea 43%
- Carmarthen 19%
- Lampeter 13%
- Birmingham 12%
- Cardiff 6%
- Distance learners 5%
- London 2%
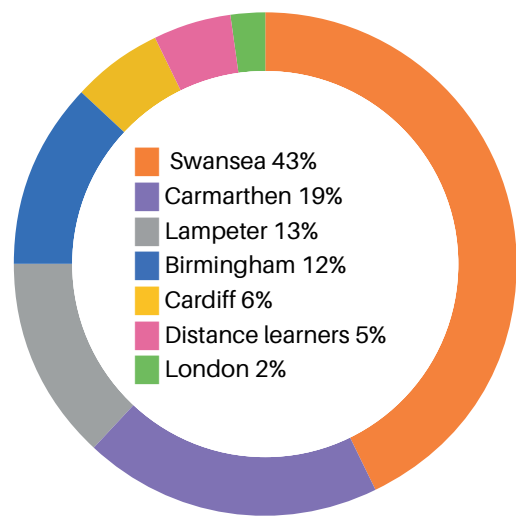
Overall Response Rate by Institute

- Over half (52%) of our respondents were from the Institute of Education & Humanities (IEH)

- 20% were from the Institute of Management & Health (IMH)

- 13% were from London Campus & Birmingham Learning Centre (LC/BLC)

- 15% were from Wales Institute of Science & Art (WISA)

- IEH 52%
- IMH 20%
- WISA 15%
- LC/BLC 13%
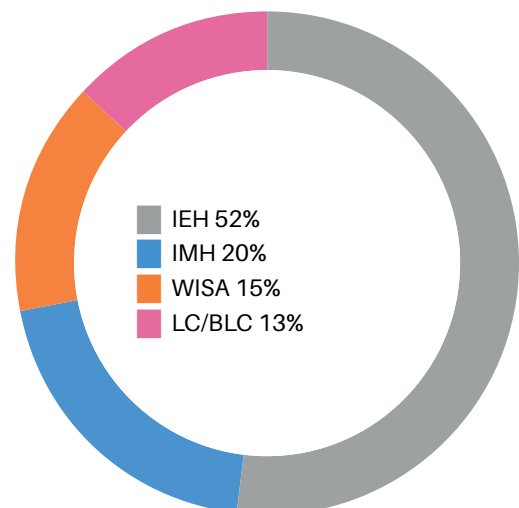
The majority (80%) of respondents were Undergraduate students, although every level of study is represented in the survey data. 13% of respondents were Postgraduate Taught and 2% were Postgraduate Research students. 6% of respondents were Entry Certificate students. In terms of mode of study, 90% of respondents said they were full-time and 10% were part-time.

In an optional section of the Big SU Survey, students were offered the opportunity to give further insights to their demography.

- 68% were female,

- 27% were male, and

- 1% non-binary.

Response Rate by Gender

- Male 27%
- Female 68%
- Non-binary 1%
- Unknown 4%
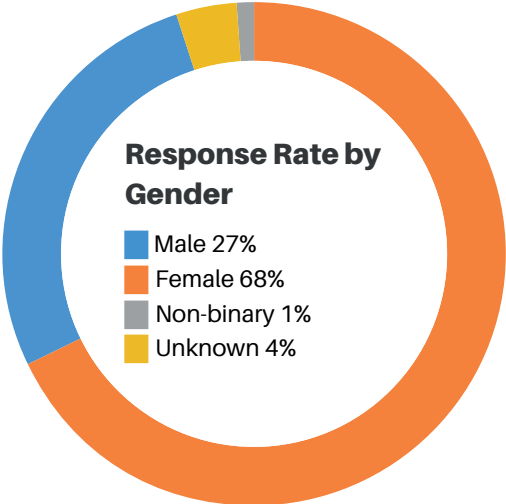
An overwhelming majority of respondents were aged 16-24, although students from all age groups were represented in the data.

In terms of ethnicity, the majority of respondents disclosed that they were white and British or Welsh. BAME students made up 15% of total respondents. We are satisfied that this representation is fairly close to the most recent figures published in the Equality & Diversity Annual Report 2018-19, which showed the BAME total to be 20.9%.

29% of students said they have caring responsibilities, while 23% declared a disability or health condition in the Big SU Survey. We are satisfied that the data presented in this report effectively embodies the diverse UWTSD student body, and that students from traditionally underrepresented groups have offered insights to their experiences.

Response Rate by Disability/Health Condition

- 23% Yes
- 70% No
- 7% Prefer not to say
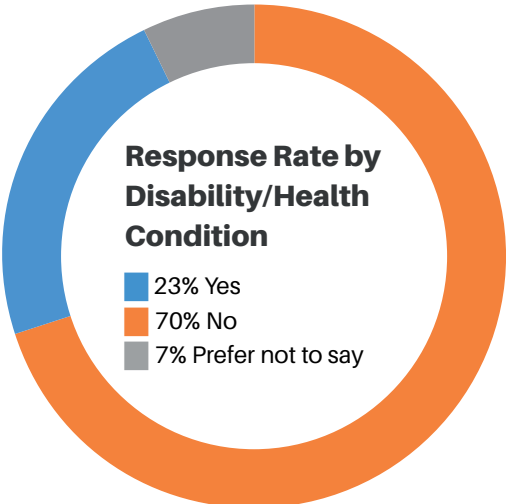
In previous reports we have acknowledged that because our surveys have been created and promoted within the Students' Union, by nature students who are already engaged in our activities have made up a significant proportion of responses. This year, in addition to promoting the opportunity through students who are already actively engaged in our activities, we reached out to staff responsible for each Academic Discipline to ask for their support. We were delighted with the response, and were able to deliver a range of in-class activities with students across UWTSD. We also gained some responses through outreach to work-based learners and distance learners. The data presented in this report represents the views of a wider sample.

Outcomes

Trend 1: Parity of Personal/Year Tutor Framework

The University's personal tutor framework is a valuable and effective source of academic and pastoral support for its diverse student body. Feedback has shown that it can enhance the sense of security and belonging for students at UWTSD, helping them to thrive and reach their individual potential.

In the Academic Quality Handbook the University notes that this protocol is in place "to support students and to protect students with protected characteristics". Whether students feel effectively supported throughout their studies has implications for satisfaction levels, retention and progression. This is reflected in the Student Charter, where there is a commitment to the academic and pastoral support of every student through this framework, and recognition that this feeds directly into the institution's values of inclusivity and excellent teaching. Therefore, individually and strategically, it is vital that there is parity in the delivery of this service across the institution.

To this end, the Big SU Survey asked students from all areas of the University if they had personal tutors and if they were happy with the levels of engagement with their personal tutor. 67% of respondents said that they have a personal tutor, and most said that they are happy with how often they are able to communicate with them.

I communicate with my personal tutor as regularly as I would like
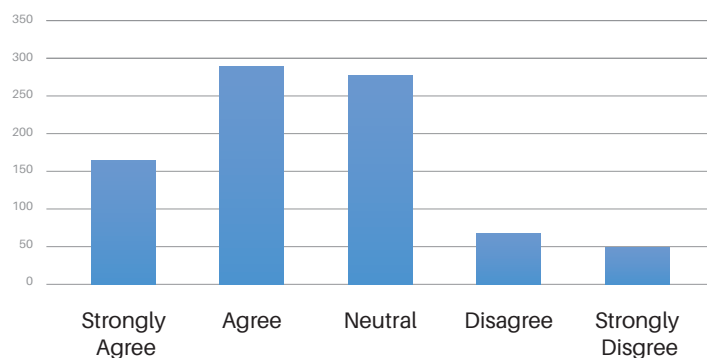
Qualitative data collected from respondents also indicated that students are happy with the level of support they receive from their personal tutors; that they communicate as regularly as they would like. Comments were particularly complementary from students in the Institute of Education & Humanities. In many cases, individual staff members have been named in positive responses, which we will share and celebrate with them in due course.

Many students commented that they did not feel they needed to approach their personal tutor for support, but knew that they were there if they wanted it in future. We feel that this encapsulates the potential of the framework, and particularly in reference to the Student Hierarchy of Needs. Many who have access to a personal tutor feel secure, empowered and confident in navigating their studies without support, while reassured that there is somewhere to turn if necessary:

"I have not had an issue that requires my personal tutor, so therefore, I have not had much contact with her. I do however know that she would be there for me should I need her."

- BA Early Years student

"My personal tutor has been a great help to me, I have spoken with him at length regarding my personal circumstances and he has offered a great deal of support. This has made my experience within the university easier."

- PGCE Secondary student

"I always receive prompt replies and tutor always manages to provide help or directs me to somebody who can."

- BA Inclusive Education student

"My tutor has been approachable and willing to help at all points during my course. I feel comfortable in approaching my tutor for advice and guidance and confident that I have always been guided in the best way possible."

- MA Bilingualism and Multilingualism student

Students have consistently praised staff for being accommodating, transparent and open in their communication. This positive feedback suggests that students feel effectively supported to access their studies, as outlined in the Student Charter and the University's values and mission; Transforming Education; Transforming Lives. Importantly, this trend is also reflected at every level of study within the Institute.

By looking at this data at Institute level, we have identified areas where students do not have the same level of access to these supportive services as their peers.
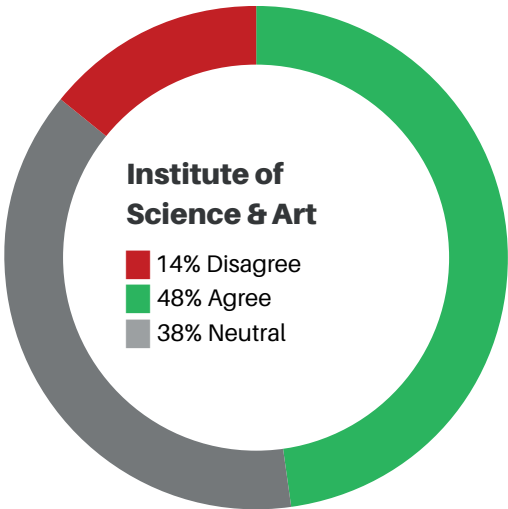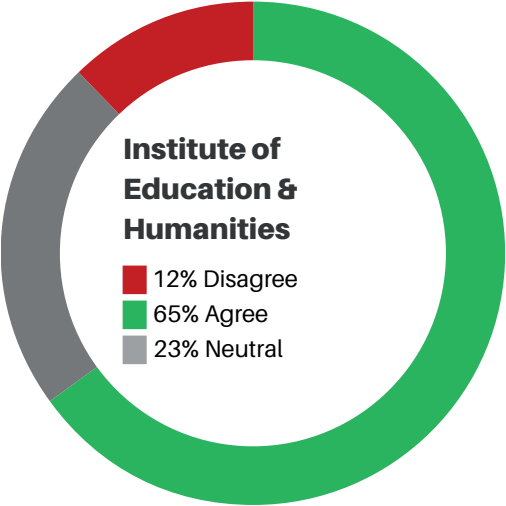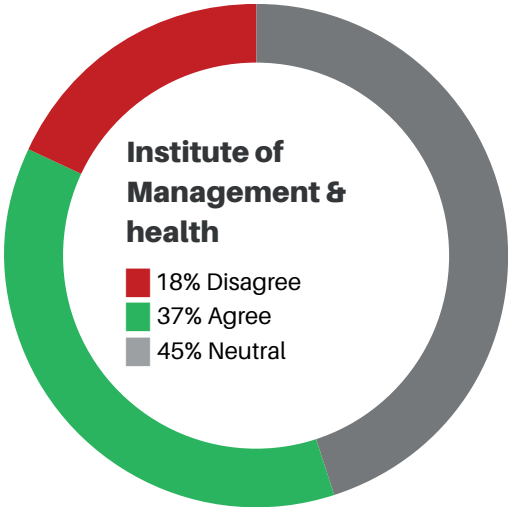
"I have a personal tutor"
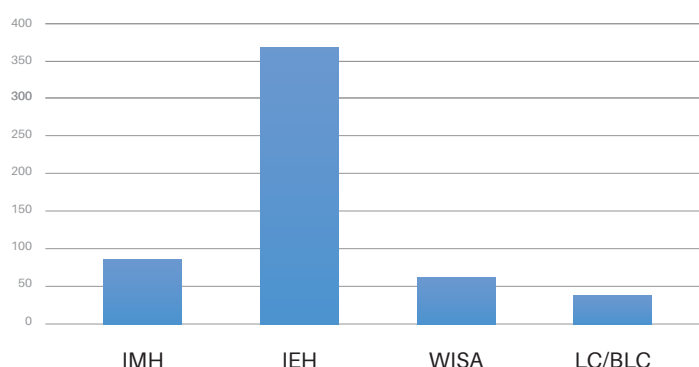
While somewhat reflecting the response rate of each Institute, our data shows that the number of students without personal tutors in the Institute of Management & Health (49%) and Wales Institute of Science & Art (45%) are still significantly higher than in the Institute of Education & Humanities (15%).

What is unclear is whether students do not have personal tutors, or if they have personal tutors but are simply unaware of them. In either case we believe that better parity can be introduced at an Institute level, to ensure that students across all Academic Disciplines can access the academic and pastoral support they need, without barriers. As outlined in AQR 3, if supported with appropriate boundaries and training, this could also support with the early identification of mental health concerns and referral before crisis point is reached.

In the Institute of Management & Health and Wales Institute of Science & Art, a greater proportion of students feel indifferent towards the level of support they receive. Although feedback remains far more positive than negative, we have identified an area where satisfaction levels could be easily increased, and would be supportive of an increased effort to share good practice at Institute level.

"I communicate with my personal tutor as regularly as I would like" by Institute

- 🔴 Disagree
- ⚫ Neutral
- 🟢 Agree

Institute of Management & health

- 🟥 18% Disagree
- 🟩 37% Agree
- ⬜ 45% Neutral

Institute of Education & Humanities

- 🟥 12% Disagree
- 🟩 65% Agree
- ⬜ 23% Neutral

Institute of Science & Art

- 🟥 14% Disagree
- 🟩 48% Agree
- ⬜ 38% Neutral

Some students offered their ideas in survey responses, which suggest that expectation-management and better parity in how information is communicated could boost satisfaction levels:

"Communicating with personal tutor is sometimes left to the responsibility of the student and can easily be forgotten when having a busy schedule when working a job alongside studies, for example, and perhaps being prompted by email or just checked up on if personal tutor hasn't heard directly from student could benefit many."

- Wales Institute of Science & Art student

"Luckily this year I have been given a personal tutor, however he is difficult to get a hold of by email, which is difficult for Distance Learners."

- Institute of Education & Humanities student

"Sometimes when emailing tutors, they don't reply back or when they do it's too late."

- Institute of Management & Health student

"I have a personal tutor" by Campus

35%	Swansea	63%	Birmingham
16%	Carmarthen	49%	Cardiff
10%	Lampeter	32%	Distance Learner
79%	London		

Interpreting the data at a campus level has exposed areas where student groups are at a disadvantage in terms of their access to the support that's promised to them in the Student Charter. These insights can be used to shed light on areas for Institutes to investigate further.

Numbers of students without personal tutors in Cardiff and Swansea are disproportionately high, and should be investigated further to ensure better consistency. Distance Learners will also benefit from increased support.

It is noteworthy that while the responses indicate otherwise, London and Birmingham students do not have personal tutors. The data indicates that students may have confused the role with their lecturers, or could potentially suggest that some students feel the appropriate support is already in place.

With this being said, in-class activity with students at Quay Place and Sparkhill, where conversations were prompted around access to academic and pastoral support, indicated that support of this nature would be widely appreciated by students. Their comments in the Big SU Survey also reflect this:

"One to ones with lecturers to go through work and make sure we actually understand what is expected."
- BA Health and Social Care student

"I would like to have a personal mentor to help with my assignment as sometimes I am struggle to understand. Mentoring could give me a kick start with my work."
- BA Health and Social Care student

"I don't have a personal tutor for the moment. I'm doing my assignments from my own research and on my own. In case if I will need for the future, I will happily work with a tutor."
- CertHE Skills for the Workplace student

"I would love a personal tutor."
- BA Health and Social Care student

Feedback gathered during in-class activity and in survey responses should be considered alongside an acknowledgement of the UWTSD Birmingham student body. The recent Partial Quality Enhancement Review of Birmingham Learning Centre acknowledged that it's attracting those who are "in many cases students who would not otherwise have dreamt of entering higher education as well as older students who are seeking employment and life skills". Many are returning to education through the CertHE Skills for the Workplace pathway, and require additional support in mastering academic skills.

Furthermore, trends in Students' Union casework suggest that students asking for support following allegations of Academic Misconduct make up 6% of overall Students' Union cases for the academic year 2019/20 to-date. Of these, 60% are students from the London campus. 3% of SU casework this year has been made up of students seeking advice after being withdrawn for poor attendance, and 80% of these cases were from Birmingham students. While the introduction of personal tutors cannot solely address this imbalance, students in these locations would undoubtedly benefit from the additional support that is available at all other campuses to benefit attainment and retention.

At a time where BAME student attainment is rightly a sector-wide and institutional focal point, it is also important to note the impact on this student group due to there not being a system at Birmingham and London. Data collected through the Big SU Survey suggests that BAME students are disproportionately affected by not having personal tutors. 50% of BAME students who participated in our survey reported that they do not have a personal tutor. Introducing better parity across campuses could therefore offer a promising and affirmative action towards addressing UWTSD's attainment gap.

Trend 1 Recommendations:

1.1. Short Term

To ensure that every student understands the personal tutor system and receives clear communication on who has been allocated as their tutor, we would be supportive of a system that features greater accountability. We are aware of the current Year Tutor form that should be signed by the student when they're given the name of their personal tutor, however we suggest a more detailed form outlining role and expectations be created for student and personal tutor to complete and sign in partnership. This should ideally form part of Welcome and Induction so that a precedent is set for the rest of the student's academic journey.

We would like to see this data feed into a central mechanism to ensure progress is measurable. Given the opportunity for the sharing of good practice in this area, we suggest that reports indicating levels of engagement should be generated for Student Experience Committee.

1.2. Short Term

As it stands, students at London and Birmingham campuses do not have access to personal tutors. We would welcome the introduction of a system that works for these students and provides them support that's comparable to that offered on all other UWTSD campuses.

1.3. Long Term

We are aware that the University is currently undergoing a full revision of its personal tutor system to include guidelines for students and staff in relation to the framework. We would welcome the introduction of 'baseline standards' to be clearly displayed as part of this wider work, to clarify expectations and introduce better parity in areas such as UWTSD's satellite campuses. We would like to see these standards designed in partnership with students.

1

Outcomes

Trend 2: Parity of Access to Services

Although not explicitly collected through questions in the Big SU Survey, in-class activity with students across UWTSD satellite campuses and outreach centers has unearthed trends in students having difficulty in accessing several professional services. We were able to reach and engage in meaningful conversations with students taught at a diverse range of venues; from University of Wales Registry Building to Quay Place; Wales International Academy of Voice to Severn Primary School. We were also able to reach students being taught on Saturdays and Fast-Track Flexi students taught in evenings from the University's main Welsh campuses.

Importantly, students in each area had positive feedback to share surrounding the quality of their teaching and the level of support they receive from Academic and Professional staff. The responses of these student groups in the Big SU Survey also reflect relatively high levels of satisfaction. Many – and particularly students taught outside of 9-5 hours – were complementary and appreciative of the opportunity to be able to undertake a degree around their busy family lives and respective careers. As a Students' Union, we are proud and are supportive of this good work. However, in each case, there was an overarching agreement that better parity could be introduced in terms of their access to important University services outside of their teaching. Access to these facilities could better support and enhance their learning.

For the purpose of this report, we will summarise our findings in terms of location, however we understand through patterns in SU casework and feedback from Student Representatives that these issues are applicable more broadly, across most UWTSD satellite campuses and outreach centers.

Students in 'out of hours' lessons on main campuses

Student groups we spoke to include FTF Early Years students in Carmarthen and Inclusive Education students in IQ, however we understand there are other courses delivered on weekends and in evenings who may be encountering similar issues with access. As an outcome of this report, the Students' Union will follow up with those students.

Although feedback around their teaching was mostly positive, these were highlighted as areas for development:

• At the beginning of the academic year, these student groups had difficulty accessing the IT Service Desk and Hwb, which slowed down enrolment for many. Students shared that some of their peers had dropped out of their course because of this upheaval at the beginning of their student journey, which put them off continuing their studies at UWTSD. Rolling out these in-person services to be more accommodating of 'non-traditional' student groups could positively impact retention.

• Students have reported difficulties in accessing the library during the current opening hours because many of them work full-time to supplement their studies. They do however deserve access to the important services on offer through Library & Learning Resources; including InfoSkills sessions, access to physical resources and book loans, and the quiet study areas. Many students within these cohorts commute from other parts of the country – in some cases as far as Pembroke and Bristol – but reported to feeling they cannot make the most of their visits when they are here due to the rigidity of opening hours. Furthermore, when students have found time to come to campus during open hours and have managed to loan books, a few students reported to have experienced a build-up in library fines due to not being able to return books while on campus. As a consequence, many students fed back that they have resorted to using the facilities at Swansea University library when they visit the city. The students were disappointed at having to do this, because they feel proud and would like to support UWTSD, but are simply not accommodated on campus when they need access.

• Students on FTF pathways in Cardiff and Carmarthen with additional learning needs shared frustration that they were not able to access Learning Support at a time they were not in work themselves. Although these individual cases were raised with the Student Services team at the time, we feel that this is noteworthy as these issues may be felt elsewhere and there may be a wider problem with flexible support.

Students on satellite campuses and outreach centers

Similar to the above, Students' Union visits to the University's satellite campuses have inspired conversations surrounding facilities available elsewhere that students would like to access. Examples include access to social and recreational spaces, Students' Union office and library facilities (outside of reference-only). However, specific requests can be summarised:

- In some cases, students accessing their learning through outreach centers (such as YMCA Cardiff) would benefit from access to more robust facilities. At present, many are attending evening classes after work with no access to IT facilities or basic refreshments.

- Students in Birmingham continue to request multi-faith prayer rooms at Sparkhill. Having to travel to and use local facilities several times a day has been suggested as an interim solution, but this is disruptive to their learning. Other satellite campuses would also benefit from the introduction of these facilities.

- All campuses would benefit from the introduction of hearing induction loops or other Assistive Technology to better include deaf and hard of hearing students. This was raised as an issue in Birmingham, but would benefit many more if rolled out across all UWTSD sites.

- Students in London and Birmingham have suggested through feedback that they would benefit from additional support to develop their academic skills. Digital literacy, referencing and research skills have all been identified as areas for further attention by students in Course Rep meetings and can be supported by the trends outlined in Students' Union casework.

- As a Students' Union, we feel it's important that there is consistency in the expectations the University have for their students. At present, there is a disparity in the Academic Regulations between Welsh and LC/BLC sites. For example, attendance expectations and appeals processes are different in these locations, and trends in SU casework (highlighted earlier) suggest that LC/BLC students are at a disadvantage because of this.

Trend 2 Recommendations:

2.1. Short Term

Online platforms (VLE, Microsoft Teams, etc.) should be better utilised in areas students are learning away from the three main campuses. The Students' Union would like to see staff using these in more creative and robust ways, particularly during Welcome and Induction, to ensure 'non-traditional' student groups feel included and more confident in navigating their studies. For example, Library InfoSkills sessions could be delivered through online tutorials and participation could be encouraged at a programme level.

2.2. Short Term

Where courses are delivered from outreach centers and satellite campuses – or outside of University 'open hours' – the facilities on offer to supplement teaching on these courses should be audited at a programme level. Students should be proactively consulted and involved in this process. Where any student groups are disadvantaged, we suggest better signposting targeted at these cohorts be utilised as a short term strategy.

2.1 and 2.2 are both timely recommendations in light of the introduction of more blended learning opportunities. To ensure measurability, we suggest that both recommendations form part of an ongoing partnership project between the University and Students' Union, with updates to be given by a nominated staff member and Group President at Student Experience Committee.

2.3. Long Term

In our findings above we have highlighted specific areas where the learning of students is impacted by lack of resource. We would like to ask that parity of experience and facilities of this nature be included in planning and the future identification of new UWTSD sites.

2

Outcomes

Trend 3: Student Voice

In response to last year's NSS results around Student Voice, which showed a slight drop in overall satisfaction levels (-1.1%), we used the Big SU Survey as an opportunity to test student knowledge on the systems in place to steer their voices and influence decision-making. We believe that this research is also timely due to the changes following the University's restructure, and the introduction of Student Voice Reps across institutes, which may have affected student understanding. The Academic Quality Handbook outlines that student voice activity be embedded in planning at an institutional level, and as such, our findings present a good opportunity to plan and embed this important work further, in collaboration with each other.

We asked students broadly if they had a Course Rep, if they'd had the opportunity to put themselves forward for the position of Course Rep, and if they knew who their Student Voice Rep is. In asking these questions, we were able to identify specific areas for further attention. For the academic year 2019/20 the Students' Union have recorded a total of 387 Course Reps across UWTSD. Asking the student population generally, 69% of students said they have a Course Rep.

" I have a Course Rep"

- 69% Yes
- 15% No
- 16% Unsure
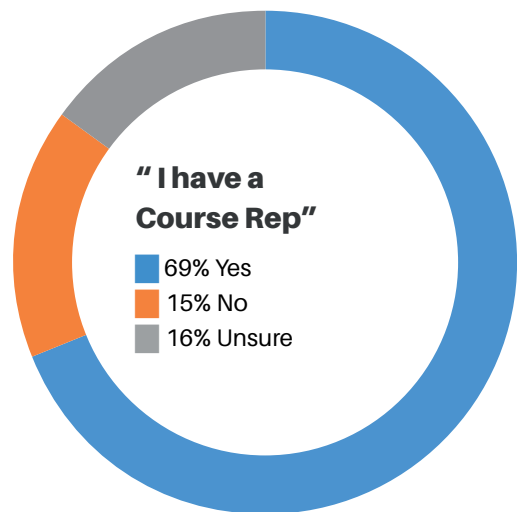
Observing the data collected at an Institute level has shown that student representation through Course Reps at Wales Institute of Science & Art is 10 percentage points higher than Institute of Management & Health. The internal Students' Union Course Rep break-down is as follows:

85	Institute of Education & Humanities
99	London Campus & Birmingham Learning Center
91	Institute of Management & Health
112	Wales Institute of Science & Art

"I have a Course Rep"
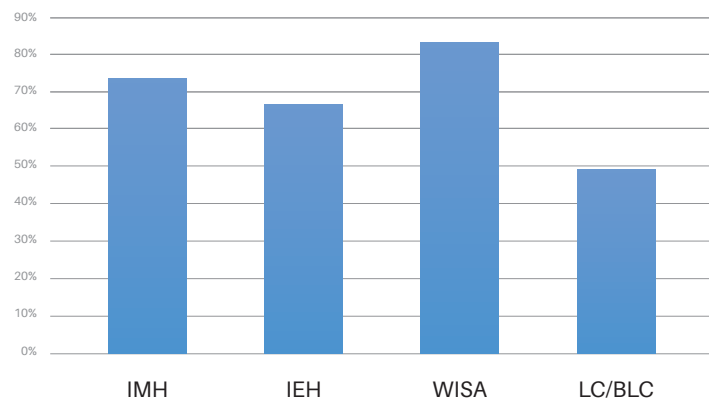
The Students' Union have observed a lot of good practice at WISA, and particularly in the area of Computing. In this Academic Discipline, students are updated through Induction talks with each level every Semester to demonstrate how student feedback has been responded to and implemented. This level of active engagement and response should be celebrated, and keeps Student Voice at the forefront of planning for the Discipline. The Discipline make an additional effort to close the feedback loop and publicise the impact of student voice. Interestingly, of the 30 respondents we had from this area, 73% of these students said they were happy with the methods of communication, with a few utilising the opportunity to give further feedback to report that they feel well informed. Only two respondents from this area said they were dissatisfied with how information was communicated. While this data is addressing communication broadly, having regular briefings with the entire cohort, where students are encouraged to voice their concerns and have productive conversations about their experiences, may influence their satisfaction levels in this area.

"I had the opportunity to nominate myself as Course Rep"
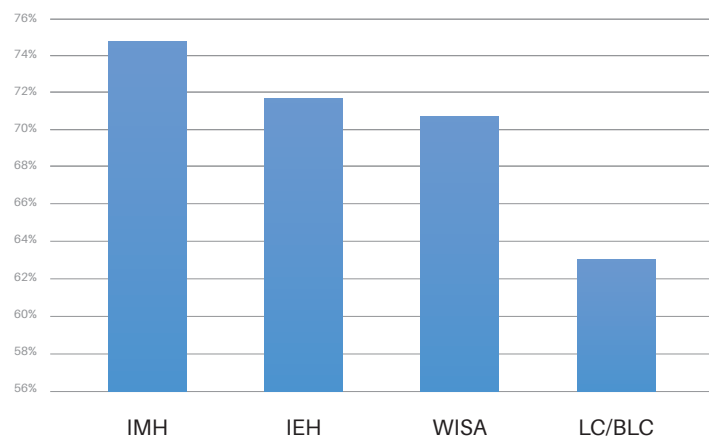
By Campus

Observing survey responses at a campus level, we have identified areas where there are larger gaps in student knowledge of the representation structures in place. This could either suggest that students are not effectively represented in these areas, or that communication about these systems should be enhanced. As a part of our annual cycle of business, we offer Student Voice Inductions to new student cohorts. It is noteworthy at this stage that although these have been successful, they have not been taken up universally.

Many distance learners – where just 17% of respondents reported to having Course Reps – responded by suggesting that either student voice activity was not applicable to them, or that they'd received no information about academic representation at the beginning of their course:

> *"Some of above not particularly relevant as I am a distance learner so don't feel the need to be so involved with this issue."*
>
> -MA Ancient History student

> *"As a distance learner, I do feel I'm on my own as far as student representation is concerned."*
>
> -BA Business Management student

> *"As a distance masters student I genuinely don't think we have a course rep. What I know is only because of my involvement in the SU not because I have been told in class."*
>
> - MA Ancient Religions student

> *"As a distance learner it is sometimes difficult to feel fully involved."*
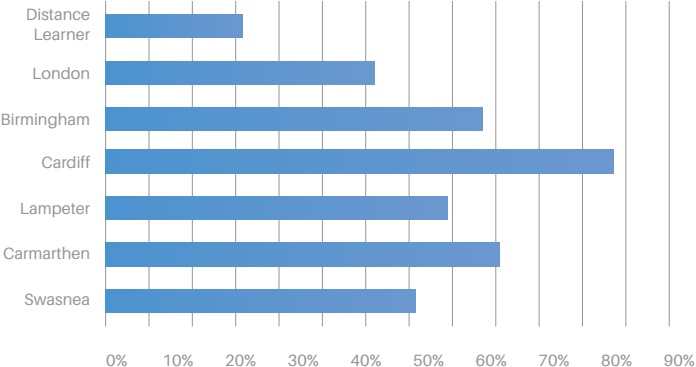>
> - MA Celtic Studies student

> *"There was no induction for distance learners."*
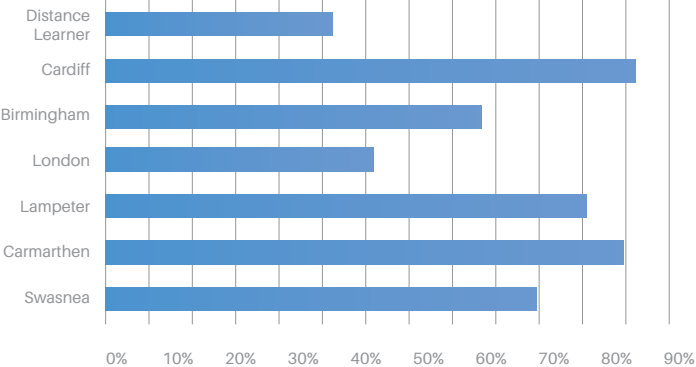>
> -MA Cultural Astronomy & Astrology student

Indeed, just 37% of distance learning respondents said that they'd had the opportunity to put themselves forward as Course Rep. Qualitative and quantitative data suggests that in collaboration with academic staff delivering these courses, we should be striving to make Student Voice activity more visible for these groups. Focusing some work in this area will ensure these students feel better represented and more involved in the University community. As a Students' Union we have produced and widely circulated

resources to support with the in-class election of Course Reps. We would welcome the opportunity to look at these in greater depth with areas for attention exposed in this report.

"I have a Course Rep"

Distance Learner, London, Birmingham, Cardiff, Lampeter, Carmarthen, Swasnea
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

"I had the opportunity to nominate myself as Course Rep"

Distance Learner, Cardiff, Birmingham, London, Lampeter, Carmarthen, Swasnea
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

As a Students' Union, we recognise the high levels of activity in Birmingham delivered through their Student Experience Officers. Students are called "Class Reps" and "Student Reps" as opposed to "Course Reps" in this location, which may have therefore affected how students answered this question. Feedback from students in Birmingham was very complementary of their Reps, and suggested that many actively engage with the systems in place. However, an area of development could be to introduce better parity in the experiences and expectations of Course Reps on all UWTSD satellite campuses.

Split by level of study, Postgraduate Taught students are reporting that they are less engaged in their representation. To supplement this data, 55% of PGT students surveyed were based in Swansea, 24% were distance learners, and 14% were studying at Lampeter campus. Embedding and increasing student knowledge for PGT students in these areas is therefore a suggestion to introduce better parity of experience.
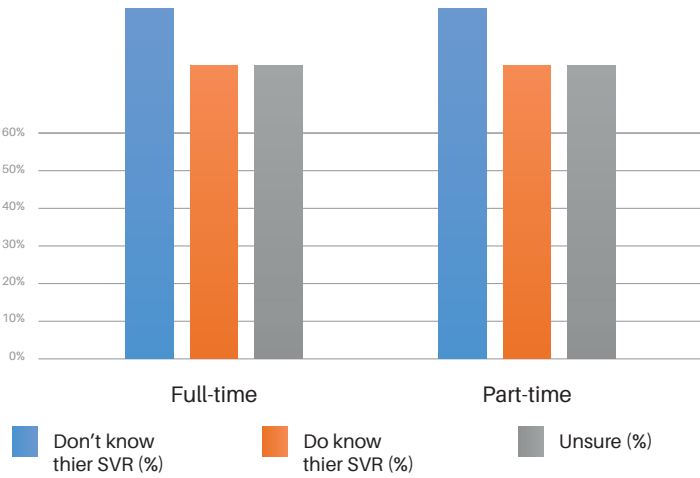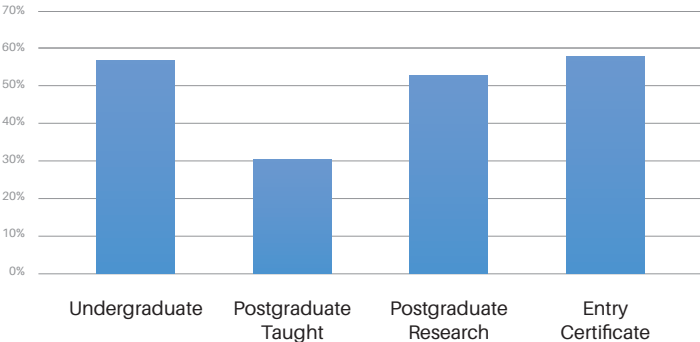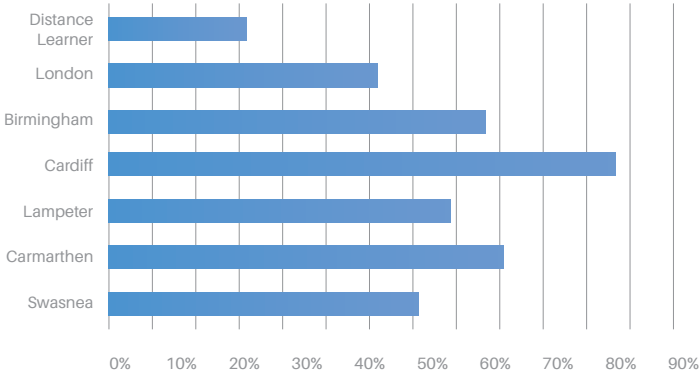
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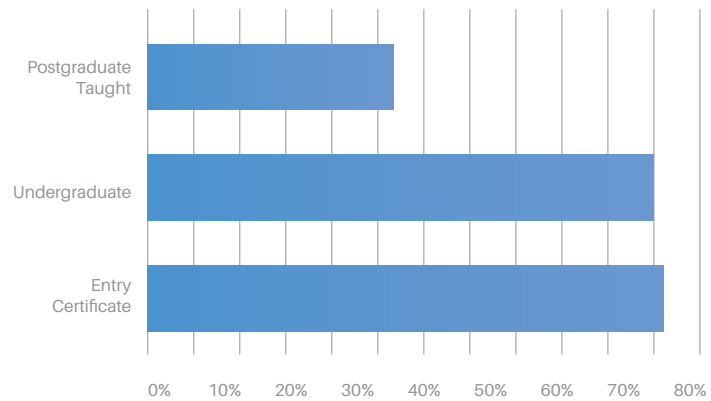
In addition, responses to the Big SU Survey have shown that comparatively, part-time students are at a disadvantage in terms of their academic representation. It is likely that many Postgraduate Taught students are also on part-time pathways to support their career development. As a Students' Union we have resources readily available for these student groups. We can also offer alternative, more flexible ways of engaging with them (including use of online platforms, content and VLE), but engagement from Academic staff and more focused partnership work will be vital in order for this to be effective.

"I have a Course Rep"
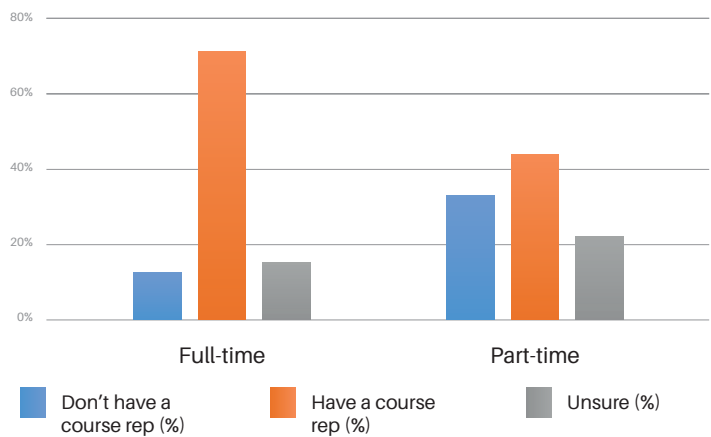
Finally, the introduction of Student Voice Reps in the place of Faculty Reps following the University's restructure has provided a firm basis for asking students about their knowledge of this role. As expected, student knowledge remains lower than knowledge of their Course Reps. This year, no Student Voice Reps were recruited to the Institute of Management & Health; an issue that will be addressed in coming months. 52% of students at the Wales Institute of Science & Art and 53% of students in Institute of Education & Humanities know who their Student Voice Rep is. 58% of students based in London Campus & Birmingham Learning Centre reported to knowing who their Student Voice Rep is. We look forward to raising awareness of this important role in collaboration with the Institutes over the next academic year.

"I know who my Student voice Rep is"

Chart 1 — By location (percentage)

Location	%
Distance Learner	~20%
London	~41%
Birmingham	~58%
Cardiff	~79%
Lampeter	~53%
Carmarthen	~61%
Swasnea	~47%

Chart 2 — By study level

Level	%
Undergraduate	~57%
Postgraduate Taught	~31%
Postgraduate Research	~53%
Entry Certificate	~58%

Chart 3 — Full-time vs Part-time

	Full-time	Part-time
Don't know thier SVR (%)		
Do know thier SVR (%)		
Unsure (%)		

- Don't know thier SVR (%)
- Do know thier SVR (%)
- Unsure (%)

Trend 3 Recommendations:

3.1. Short Term

To introduce better parity of experience at UWTSD's satellite campuses, we would like to see key stakeholders identified at each location and for distance learners in each Institute. As a Students' Union, we would like to work in partnership with these individuals to develop more robust, cohort-specific student voice activity.

3.2. Short Term

Further to 3.1, Moodle could be better utilised in the delivery of student voice activity for 'harder to reach' student groups, including part-time, PGT, blended and distance learners. This is another opportunity for partnership work between academic staff and Students' Union.

Engagement and satisfaction levels (through feedback, survey data) should be measured and reported at each Institute Board.

3.3. Long Term

As a Students' Union, we would welcome the introduction of a more proactive approach to student voice activity in some areas. Organising compulsory Induction talks at the beginning of each Semester to demonstrate how feedback has been responded to through the representation systems in place will reinforce the value of student voice. It may boost engagement and student satisfaction.

3

Conclusion

Our research this year, focusing on parity of experience, has heeded a response from students which suggests that overall satisfaction levels are high. Feedback gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods has showcased a great deal of good practice at whole-University, Institute and at programme level across UWTSD. As a Students' Union we are extremely supportive and proud of these achievements, and are looking forward to sharing individual successes with these areas following the circulation of this report.

Students have also reported disparity in a number of areas, which we feel offers the University an ideal opportunity to respond, demonstrating its commitment to the quality and equity of its student experience.

Table of Recommendations

1.1	To ensure that every student understands the personal tutor system and receives clear communication on who has been allocated as their tutor, we would be supportive of a system that features greater accountability. We are aware of the current Year Tutor form that should be signed by the student when they're given the name of their personal tutor, however we suggest a more detailed form outlining role and expectations be created for student and personal tutor to complete and sign in partnership. This should ideally form part of Welcome and Induction so that a precedent is set for the rest of the student's academic journey.
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