# University of South Wales Students' Union Annual Quality Report

## 2018/19

# Introduction

The University of South Wales has been clear in its commitment in recent years to improving the student experience. The time and resource invested in the Student Experience Plan has resulted in direct improvement for students studying at the University of South Wales.

The primary purpose of this document is to highlight areas we believe should be considered by the institution for investment and development. In addition, as this document has been informed by the students themselves, to highlight areas of best practise.  Whilst the Annual Quality Report is a Students' Union owned document, we are keen to work in partnership with faculties and the University to deliver on the recommendations made throughout the report.

## 2% INCREASE IN STUDENT SATISFACTION
### NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

2019: 83%
2018: 81%

# ABOVE SECTOR AVERAGE IN ~

**LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**
**ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK**
**ACADEMIC SUPPORT**
**LEARNING RESOURCES**
**LEARNING COMMUNITY**
**STUDENT VOICE**

The partnership between the University of South Wales and the Students' Union has strengthened in recent years.  We are pleased to have been front and centre of the Student Experience Plan projects, and to have had the opportunity to shape the impact of these as the outputs become embedded in day-to-day delivery.

This year in particular, we have worked closely with the Quality Unit in authoring a comparative analysis of USW's student engagement against the new Quality Code, and also providing feedback on the re-structured Regulations for Taught Courses. Regular meetings with the Director

of Student Services, the Director of Learning Services, and the Director of Estates and Facilities has ensured the development of front-line services has input from students.

In order to compile this year's report we have analysed in detail the projects completed by the Student Voice Representatives, Course Representative Assemblies, feedback gathered during USWSU's Change Week, nominations from the Student Choice Awards, and from motions submitted and debated at our Annual General Meeting.  This amounts to over 2,500 individual responses and suggestions to a wide range of different issues.

# 01

# The Student Voice

This section looks at the student voice at USW, an analysis of the current academic representation system, and feedback and recommendations on the University's LOOP system.

**79%**
**OVERALL SATISFIED**

**86%** I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course.

**79%** Staff value students' views and opinions about the course.

**70%** It is clear how students' views have been acted on.

## NSS 2018: SATISFACTION FOR STUDENT VOICE

# ACADEMIC REPRESENTATION SYSTEM

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The Students' Union runs and facilitates the academic representation system for the University. We have seen engagement in this rise year on year, as students realise the benefits of becoming engaged in influencing their learning experiences, as well as raising issues in real time. We are pleased with the increasing satisfaction in this area, demonstrated by the increasing scores, and also the rise in satisfaction with the Students' Union. However, we recognise that we are still below the sector average in this, and continue to work hard to increase our score. We hope that through continuing our hard work in this area, coupled with increased visibility across the University, students will understand the role of the Students' Union in representing their academic interests.

## 66%
### OF COURSE REPS TRAINED
**INCREASED FROM 49% IN 2017/18 AND 28% IN 2016/17.**

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## 95%
### OF COURSE REPS AGREED THAT THE CURRENT SCHEME IS EFFECTIVE.

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## 98%
### OF STUDENTS STATED THAT THEY WERE SATISFIED WITH THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED FROM THE SU DURING THEIR TIME AS A COURSE REP.

## COURSE REP OF THE YEAR WAS AWARDED TO ANNA BILLES

"Anna has forged firm friendships with students across several years through her proactive attitude and activity. This has enabled some students we were nervous and apprehensive about settling into campus life to establish themselves and find their feet, definitely contributing to the course's improved retention rates."

"Anna is a popular and well respected member of the class, who has been a crucial member of the course community this year."

## STUDENT VOICE REPS

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100% Student Voice Reps fed back that communication from the Student Voice Team was effective over the year, with 80% saying the same of university staff. However, only 7% of Student Voice Reps believed that there was effective communication from Course Reps.

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**I REALLY ENJOYED THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIAISE WITH SENIOR UNIVERSITY STAFF."**

**"THE BEST PART WAS PARTICIPATING IN STUDENTS' UNION CAMPAIGNS."**

**"BEING AN SVR THIS YEAR HAS REALLY IMPROVED MY CONFIDENCE."**

## 20 STUDENT VOICE REPS

## 100% OF SVRS TRAINED

### SVR OF THE YEAR WAS AWARDED TO JOSH BROWN (FCES)

"If a student has a problem, you know that you can count on Josh to either solve the problem, or pass it on to somebody who can. He is so friendly and approachable, and is always chatting to students to find out if there is anything he needs to take to a meeting."

"Josh promotes the SVR role, and the Students' Union, widely amongst students, and is a fantastic ambassador for both. He is incredibly busy, but he still always makes sure that he is doing everything he needs to do to really represent the students in his school."

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- The University to include training on the Academic Representation systems as part of new academic staff induction training.
- The University to promote the Course Rep scheme, and training dates, during induction week.
- The University to maintain an accurate, up-to-date list of all Course Leaders, in order to improve the communication between the University and the Students' Union's Student Voice Team.
- Course Leaders to send details of the Course representatives through to the Students' Union during the first week of teaching.
- The University to promote the Course Reps and Student Voice Rep schemes as being run by the Students' Union.

# COMMENDATION

The close working relationship between the faculties Heads of Learning and Teaching and the Students' Union's Student Voice Team enables the success of the academic representation system.

## LOOP

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Two of the Student Voice Representatives evaluated the University's feedback mechanism for their end of year project One focussed on the Pontypridd campuses, and the other on Cardiff and Newport. Interestingly, there was parity across the projects, with similar responses and opinions from students. The majority of students who engaged in the projects acknowledged LOOP as one of the main feedback forums for the University, although concerns were raised about the effectiveness of the system.

64% of students in Cardiff and Newport were either unsure or did not believe that their 'views matter' to the University, and students at the Pontypridd campuses asked for better clarity and more information on what happens as a consequence of their feedback.

**" IF LECTURERS SPEAK TO STUDENTS SAYING WHAT ISSUES WERE HIGHLIGHTED AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING OR CANNOT DO ABOUT THEM. THIS WAY IT WOULDN'T FEEL LIKE SUCH A WASTE OF TIME. "**

**" OCCASIONALLY THEY WILL DISCUSS THEM IF IT IS A COURSE-SPECIFIC ISSUE. THERE IS NEVER A DISCUSSION AROUND THE UNIVERSITY WIDE ISSUES THAT HAVE BEEN REPORTED. "**

Giving feedback to students from LOOP is reliant on academic staff; however, this creates an anomaly. Course and module leaders do not have the authority to react to student feedback from LOOP, this is the role of academic managers and above. Students believe it is the academics in the classroom that will enact change, and this leads to frustrations if not dealt with appropriately or in a timely manner.

Students raised concerns over the anonymity of the questionnaire, as it is necessary to login with a student ID. This led to a reluctance to complete LOOP, particularly with fears over repercussions for negative feedback.

41% of students in Cardiff and Newport feel that Loop fails to allow them to give adequate feedback on their course, and a large number of students in Pontypridd asked for LOOP to be amended to include a section for positive feedback.

> **THE NSS SURVEY ASKS FOR ONE POSITIVE AND ONE NEGATIVE ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE IN TWO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS. IF THE UNIVERSITY WISHES TO MAP TO THE NSS THEN IT SHOULD DO THIS."**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The University to raise the profile of LOOP through a University–wide approach, demonstrating the importance of students completing the survey.

- Clarity over what happens with the feedback; where it goes, how it considered, and how changes are made.

- The University to explore amending the survey to enable students to provide positive comments.

# 02

ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT 2018-19

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# Learning and Teaching

This section looks at the Student Choice Awards, our international students' learning experience, and the factors that lead to contract cheating.

**NSS**
**NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2018**

**89%** AGREED THAT STAFF ARE GOOD AT EXPLAINING THINGS

**84%** WAS SATISFIED WITH THE TEACHING ON THEIR COURSE

**84%** WAS SATISFIED WITH THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED

## STUDENT CHOICE AWARDS

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We receive regular feedback from students on the high regard in which they hold their lecturers. The majority of students are happy with their academic experiences, which is evidenced in the increasing engagement in the Student Choice Awards.

The nominations provided the Students' Union with excellent data on what students' value and how they want to be taught.

# 1497
**NOMINATIONS 2018-19**

# 1437
**NOMINATIONS 2017-18**

# 1332
**NOMINATIONS 2016-17**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The University to recognise the importance of the Student Choice Awards, and promote the event across all campuses.
- To work in partnership with the Students' Union to explore more detailed analysis of the nominations.

## COMMENDATION

The support given by CELT to the Student Choice Awards nominations process.

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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SVR research on international students' learning experience indicated that our students considered cultural differences and different teaching methods to be the biggest barriers to learning when studying at the University, and not so much language barriers. A very small number of students who participated in the research considered their lectures and tutorials to be culturally inclusive, and there is a clear call for lecturers to use a range of diverse examples when teaching.

> *Johnston (2010) calls for culturally responsive mechanisms to reduce the impact of culture shocks. Welikala (2013) proposes this will help other marginalised students attain better grades and assist the existing widening participation agenda.*

> "**THERE'S A LOT OF HOME KNOWLEDGE THAT ISN'T PRIVY TO ME PRIOR TO COMING TO THE UK SO SOMETIMES IT'S HARD FOR ME TO FIT IN.**"

> "**LECTURERS SHOULD BE USING DIFFERENT RANGES OF EXAMPLES TO MAKE STUDENTS UNDERSTAND CLEARLY RATHER THAN JUST USING ONE EXAMPLE AND EXPECTING THEM TO UNDERSTAND STRAIGHT AWAY.**"

> "**I GUESS CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IS PRETTY VIVID. SO IT'S A BIT DIFFICULT TO FIT IN.**"

**" I THINK SOME LECTURERS TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS UNDERSTAND SOME AREAS THAT THEY ACTUALLY MAY NOT. MY COURSE IS CATERED MORE TO HOME STUDENTS, SO IT MAY BE DIFFICULT FOR STAFF TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION FROM INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS."**

Despite this, the research was clear that our international students considered the standard of teaching to be higher at USW than in their home countries:

**" THE QUALITY IS FAR BETTER THAN MY COUNTRY BANGLADESH."**

**" GOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WITH STUDENT FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND SKILLED LECTURERS AND SUPPORTED TEACHING STAFF."**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The University should ensure culturally diverse curriculum at the validation / re-validation process.
- The University to provide cultural awareness training to staff who are Personal Academic Coaches to international students.

## COMMENDATION

The University has excellent, established support systems for international students, particularly the support provided by the International Office and the Chaplaincy.

# FACTORS THAT LEAD TO CONTRACT CHEATING

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Contract cheating is a trend that is on the increase.  Last year the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) sent out open letters to technology companies like Google, Facebook and PayPal. They called for these companies to 'block the essay mill providers from using their services' (QAA. 2018). In April, PayPal announced it would block essay mils from using its services Contract cheating services also use online advertising to target students. A BBC investigation found more than 250 YouTube channels promoting 'EduBirdie', an essay writing service. YouTube removed the videos as they infringed on their advertising policies against selling 'academic aids' (Liptak, A. 2018). Google, which owns YouTube, no longer allows contract cheating services to advertise within its search results (Google. 2019).

The Students' Union has recognised this, with direct experience of essay writing services trying to advertise through flyers and posters in the Students' Union buildings, in addition to proof reading agencies asking to attend Freshers Fairs.

The University's most recent Academic Misconduct Regulations defines contract cheating as: "when students put out to tender or buy an essay or assignment, either 'off the shelf' or specifically written for them and submit it as their own work".  Qualitative research undertaken through focus groups by Joshua Brown, SVR for Computing and Maths discovered that the majority of respondents had an understanding of academic integrity, but didn't know where they could access information on USW academic integrity policies or how to access University support on study skills.  Multiple reasons were given for why a student would contract cheat, including assignment bunching, the types of assignment, fear of failing, opportunity and lack of motivation.

The research highlighted the easy availability of accessing contract cheating, with these agencies now using social media and direct messaging as a form of getting to students to use their services.  The language used in direct messaging is such that vulnerable students may not realise that using these services are contrary to USW's academic integrity policies. Messages seen by the Students' Union include calling students by their first name, knowledge of the course they are studying, and using the terms

"professional academic writers" who "have been helping students with their assignments and dissertations for the last seven years".  These messages could easily be misinterpreted by students as coming from lecturers wanting to help them in their studies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Raise awareness by having a positive outlook on academic integrity.** The University should work with the Students' Union to emphasise the importance of academic integrity.
- **Better promotion of support available.** Students should be made aware of how to access study skills services. There should be easier access to USW's misconduct regulations.
- **Review modules to ensure academic skills are embedded.**The curriculum should be designed around applying academic skills, particularly around foundation and first year. Academic integrity also needs to be clearly explained in lectures and inductions.
- **Review modules and making sure they use a mixture of assessments.** Students respond well to assessments have a practical element. These allow students to demonstrate more than your traditional academic report, and would reduce the opportunity for contract cheating.
- **Better moderation of social media feeds.** The University should make sure that all USW social media groups,are properly moderated. For groups outside the jurisdiction of the University, Course Reps and SVRs could help report contract cheating content.
- **Establish an anonymous reporting system.** This would allow students and staff to submit links and screenshots.
- **Raise awareness of how contract cheating agencies work.** Staff should be made aware of predatory techniques contract cheating services use on social media.

## COMMENDATION

Josh is now the Student Advisor on Contract Cheating for the QAA Academic Integrity Committee. Working together, we can confront contract cheating and set the industry standard.

# 03

# Learning Technologies

This section examines students thoughts on Blackboard, and computer software availability.

**NSS**
NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2018

**86%** WAS SATISFIED WITH THE LEARNING RESOURCES PROVIDED

**84%** IT RESOURCES AND FACILITIES PROVIDED HAVE SUPPORTED MY LEARNING WELL

**88%** I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACCESS COURSE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES (EQUIPMENT, FACILITIES, SOFTWARE, COLLECTIONS) WHEN I NEEDED TO

It is clear students rely heavily on online technologies to support them in their day-to-day learning. The University directs students to utilise the various online platforms to assist in their learning, whether that be through e-mail, e-journals, or the VLE. Research undertaken over the past two years has found that students do not consistently use Blackboard, preferring to rely on emails for course and lecture updates.

Similar results were obtained across the two years, notably that our students find the layout of Blackboard confusing, that they would like consistency across the module layouts, and the Blackboard app was not fit for purpose. At the moment, it is clear that students do not think that Blackboard is meeting the minimum requirements for course organisation, where information should be presented in a clear and consistent manner.

> **" THE APP IS AWFUL. I CAN'T SEE HALF THE SCREEN. I HATE IT. "**

> **" THE ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE ALL MUDDLED UP AND IT IS HARD TO FILTER THROUGH TO THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENTS. "**

> **" TOO MUCH JARGON, SOME UNNECESSARY, SIMPLIFYING IS WHAT IT NEEDS. "**

> **" POORLY DEVELOPED, HAS POTENTIAL TO BE A DECENT PLATFORM. "**

> **" LAYOUT DIFFERS IN EACH MODULE, LACK OF CONSISTENCY. "**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Training given to staff who populate Blackboard to ensure clarity and consistency of approach.
- The University should undertake a review of the Blackboard app to ensure it becomes fit for purpose.

# COMPUTER SOFTWARE AVAILABILITY

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The development and evolution of courses increases the demand on specialist software to support students' learning.  Research has primarily focused on the demands of computing students, however it is becoming apparent that demand for specialist software is becoming more common across subject disciplines. In 2017-2018, the findings were broadly positive, confirming that there is adequate software available to accommodate Computer Games Development and Computer Science students. Even the least readily available software, Unity, was available for an average of 4.9 hours per student, per week. However, this does not take into account any other students who may require the same software, and does not factor in pinch points that occur throughout the year as a result of assignment deadlines.

Research this year has indicated that students do not restrict their study to the campus of delivery. Several Glyntaff students make use of the Treforest campus for access to the library and to study. This could increase future demand for specialist software to be distributed across our different campuses, and not be confined to a small number of rooms or labs.  International Wildlife Biology students, in particular, had issues with their software not being available across a range of labs. Vortex and Primer were prime suspects of software being limited to a handful of (or even single) rooms.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The University should review the availability of classrooms, with a view to reduce the number of one hour gaps in rooms that have specialist software on the computers.**
Gaps of one hour or less in room timetables severely reduce the availability of computers, for the reason that students do not get much use out of a computer in a one hour session. Reduction of these gaps could account for thousands of hours worth of extra usable computer time each week.

- **The University should ensure up-to-date, accurate information is available to students, which list the version numbers of software available across all computer labs.**

- **To increase the opening hours of specialist computer labs.**
Students will be enabled to have more opportunity to find free computer labs, and could be incentivised to stay on campus for longer. 24-hour access facilities such as the Treforest Library lack important software required to make it a viable substitute.

- **Software availability should be factored into timetables and coursework deadlines.**
A full retrospective analysis of software requirements throughout the year, taking into account all courses and their software needs, may throw up compelling arguments for moving certain assignments to avoid scarcity issues. This could result in fewer students becoming anxious about assignment deadlines, and have positive effects on students' mental health.

# Conclusion

The University's commitment to investing in the student experience over recent years is evident. The importance placed on the student voice, coupled with the development of the Personal Academic Coach scheme and Learner Analytics, illustrates how the University and Students' Union works together to engage with students and staff to improve the learning environment.

Although is it clear from this report that there are some areas that could improve, it is fair to say that the University is listening to student feedback, and maintains an open dialogue with the Students' Union and its students.

We hope the University will take on board the recommendations contained within the report, and look forward to supporting the University in driving these forward. We are confident that through working together, in the spirit of partnership, students studying at the University of South Wales will have an excellent student experience.

**Undeb Myfyrwyr**
Prifysgol De Cymru
University of South Wales
**Students' Union**