

Students' Union Student Feedback Report – February 2023

The Student's Union Monthly Feedback Report aims to provide a summary of the most prominent issues and concerns raised by students with SU within the previous month. This report contains insights from February 2023, including statistics from our Advice Centre & Helpdesk, our online feedback platform Union Voice, our Department Reps within the 3 colleges, as well as a critical issue raised by our International Student's Officer.

Table 1: The source of data used throughout this report, as well as the number of queries or responses. All instances of Feedback received between 1st and 28th February 2023, unless otherwise stated.

Source	Number of queries / respondents
Advice Centre	100
Helpdesk	282
Union Voice	2 (+5 outstanding)
Department Rep Reports	14 across SSA, HWLS & BTE
International Student Tuition Fee Survey	310

Report Summary

- The **Students' Union's Advice Centre** received 100 new enquiries between 1st and 28th February 2023, a 25% increase on last month. While topics were varied, concerns around academic conduct, financing and complaints around failures to adhere to learning contracts were prominent.
- The **Students' Union's Helpdesk** received 282 queries from students in February. Common queries included societies (both academic and social), events, volunteering and merchandise.
- New submissions to **Union Voice** included a mass submission from a BTE course rep detailing that as many as 80% of their course mates felt they lacked suitable supported during their placement year.
- **Our Department Reps** fed back regarding on efforts to enhance the sense of community within departments across all 3 colleges, a desire on the part of students to engage in the process of portfolio and curriculum redevelopment, and troublingly, on student disquiet on the failure to consistently implement student learning contracts, particularly in relation to exams.
- Our **International Student's Officer** collected feedback from over 300 students struggling to meet their February tuition fee deadline due to political and financial turmoil in Nigeria. Through this intervention a bespoke process has been implemented that should help upwards of 700 international students continue their studies.

Monthly Statistics from the Students' Union

The [Students' Union's Advice Centre](#) received 100 new enquiries in February, an increase of around 25% on the prior month, as the semester got underway properly. The vast majority of these (92) were submitted online, either by email, our website form or our new '[AskUs](#)' online platform. The main being discussed by students in these enquiries were:

- **Academic Issues:** including Academic Conduct, Appeals, Complaints (particularly about disability provisions not being adhered to), Non-engagement **44**
- **Funding & Fees Issues:** including a large number of students having difficulties with paying tuition fees **25**
- **Housing Issues:** leaving tenancy / not realising had signed a tenancy, complaints, inter-tenant disputes **13**
- **Miscellaneous** **10**
- **Debt Issues** **3**
- **Employment Issues** **2**
- **Benefits** **1**

The **Students' Union's Helpdesk** received 282 queries from students during the month of February, consistent with January's figures. Of these, the majority (**164**) were received face-to-face at the Students' Union Helpdesk located in the Hubs. The most common type of queries received were:

- Societies, [Give It a Go](#) events, and volunteering (**55**),
- SU merchandise (**45**),
- Academic issues (**29**),
- Finance or funding (**8**)
- SU elections (**8**)

Academic issues tend to be signposted to students' representatives (i.e., Course or Department), the University's Hallam Help, Course Leaders, or the Advice Centre, dependent on need.

Union Voice

The Students' Union online feedback platform, [Union Voice](#), received two new submissions in January, one of which was resolved, along with five other previously ongoing issues. There are a further two open & ongoing issues from November and December.

Of the two new submissions:

- One related to discriminatory comments in a Society group chat. This student has been directed to the SU societies' formal mediation & complaints process.
- The second, received via a BTE course rep, advises that fully 80% of students on that course felt they had received little or no support from the university during their placement year. The rep has raised this issue with their course leader directly, who advised that future cohorts will receive greater levels of support and proper guidance.

Of the five previously open issues, two also related to placements:

- The first was from a final year Social Work & Community Studies student, unhappy that lectures and contact hours were being scheduled seemingly without consideration of the significant amount of time students are required to spend on placement, leading to frequent clashes and a truncated number of contact hours. Furthermore, what contact time they were able to attend was spread unevenly, with some sessions requiring the student to attend campus for 1 hour of teaching.

- The second was from a teaching student unhappy with the lack of support from the university whilst on placement. The College Officer has been working in close collaboration with the department on this issue and feels there needs to be further investigation into the area of placement support more generally.

Given the importance of practical and vocational placements in Sheffield Hallam's student offering, the provision of placement support, both academically and pastorally, across the university will be a significant part of the SU's evaluative focus going forward.

The remaining three resolved cases, concerned:

- An international Business student struggling to find permanent accommodation.
- And two queries relating to the cold temperatures at Aspect Court.

The unresolved cases are as follows:

- A student with Business student with special support needing additional training on university equipment and systems. Again, the relevant college officer is liaising with SHU to help resolve.
- Engineering & Maths students concerned about the shift to in-person assessments. This has been raised with the university and has led to a joint statement being issued with the SU, detailing the types of support that will be available to E&M students to help them prepare for in-person exams. See the Dept Rep report for BTW below for more details. This case remains open for monitoring purposes only.

The [Trending Topics](#) from Union Voice queries are updated regularly and students are shared this information if their query fits into one of these topic areas.

Department Reps & College Student Forums

The Students' Union's [Department Representatives](#) act as a conduit for feedback from students and course reps as well as liaising with University staff on higher-level issues affecting large numbers of students. These are the significant issues raised via the dept reps in their respective February College Student Forums.

Within **Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences**, disabled student support is showing as a pressing issue for students. The **implementation of learning contracts** is not to the standard it should be, and students are therefore feeling pressure during their recent mocks and are apprehensive for the upcoming real exams. The new policy around giving all students additional time during exams is also an issue; the extra time given to students allocated it through their learning contracts is being swallowed up by the new allowance given to all students. General inclusive practice also needs to be considered as some students have reported a lack of awareness and accommodation to their needs, especially when some disabilities are not visible or recorded in learning contracts. With the **portfolio redevelopments** taking place, department reps are willing to be involved as this will be a good place to suggest practical improvements to courses from the student perspective; the upcoming Department Student Forums will be an ideal place to collect more feedback from students to feed into this. **Community feel is looking up** in departments, with Biosciences and Chemistry planning their 'Would I Lie to SHU?' and end of year ball, as well as Allied Health Professions working on brining different societies together to hold both indoor and outdoor events.

Within **Social Sciences & Art** much department rep focus has been on ways **to improve the collection of student voice feedback**. The Institute of Education Department rep has, for instance, encouraged more academic representation visibility by distributing course rep lanyards and holding drop-in sessions for course reps and students to encourage the giving of feedback in an informal setting. Similarly, the Natural & Built Environment rep is in the process of writing a report based on the results of a survey she created, which is tailored to students in different years of study. This survey has covered general university life satisfaction as well as questions about industrial action impact.

In Law & Criminology, there is little academic representation engagement with level 4 students. As such the department rep has created a survey for this demographic to investigate why this is. The hope is the results will inform future recruitment strategies for course reps.

In Psychology, Sociology & Politics, students have reported **unease surrounding the curriculum redevelopment**. As such, the Department rep and the SE lead will focus the next department student forum on this topic.

In Humanities, students have reported they feel **a lack of community** within the department, and so the Department rep and the Student Engagement Lead have been working on how best to promote this. One way being drawing more attention to the Humanities lounge on level 10 of Owen Building by hosting events there. In the same vein, the Institute of Education will be holding a ball for leaver students, which supports their objective of creating a community within the department, while there will also be a college-wide social event, led by college officer Dayo Oladiti, which will focus on the issues of sustainability. It will feature a guest speaker and panel event with members of the SU representation team and sustainability focused academic staff members. This will be followed by a student exhibition section while alumni will also be invited to this event to network with current SSA students.

Over in **Business, Technology & Engineering**, a number of issues were prominent in the College Student Forum. The issue of **time allowance in exams for students with learning contracts** was raised. Students felt that the additional 15 minutes given to all students in exams resulted in students with learning contracts not getting their fair allowance of additional time. There were suggestions that the communication of this issue needed to be looked into, and this is ongoing. Progress was made on the issue of **in-person exams in Engineering & Maths**, and a joint communication from the University & Students' Union has gone out to students about the support they can expect.

General issues with **timetabling** continued to be raised – including long gaps between contact hours and assessment bunching. It was noted this type of feedback should inform ongoing curriculum redesign work.

General feelings of being **overwhelmed** with work were also reported from some Representatives – ensuring awareness of the support available to students, such as the Support Triangle, was raised.

Feedback from Department Reps and the college student forums for Health Wellbeing & Life Sciences, Business, Technology & Engineering and Social Sciences & Arts continues to be collected and will be included in these monthly reports on an ongoing basis.

International Students: Issues with Tuition Fee Payments

In early February the SU's [International Student's Officer](#) provided the university with a list of over 300 hundred students who had missed the payment due date of 1st Feb for the next instalment of their tuition fees and would be unable or unlikely to meet the pre-exclusion deadline of 28th February. The vast majority of these had been affected by [the well documented political and](#)

[financial turmoil](#) currently ongoing in Nigeria, and their access to international banking funds had been significantly disrupted through no fault of their own.

Following this submission, the University's own analysis revealed a further 447 Nigerian students who had missed the early Feb due date and were facing enforced withdrawal and deportation.

In view of the obvious distress this situation was causing to students, and the potential for negative reputational impact to the university of a large number of enforced student withdrawals caused by circumstances outside of the control of the students in question, the Student Offer and Experience Group worked with University Finance and the Students Union to draft a bespoke procedure. This would allow students to submit evidence of their situation to gain an extension on the payment deadline, or to appoint an International Experience Adviser to various options including arranging a payment plan with Finance or discussing a break in study.

The SU will attempt to gather and monitor student feedback on the implementation of this process.

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