

Students' Union Monthly Student Feedback Report

The following provides insights into the most noteworthy issues faced by Sheffield Hallam students in July 2021. This month, the report contains information from our [Advice Centre](#) and Helpdesk, as well as qualitative data from our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' survey (which was open from 12 April to 9 May 2021). This survey received 1463 responses, with 1355 of those students leaving a comment.

*Table 1: The source of data used throughout this report, as well as the number of queries or participants. NB: *this is the number of new enquiries received from 1st to 27th July 2021. **this is number of queries from 1st to 23rd July 2021.*

| Source | Number of queries/ responses |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Advice Centre | 77* |
| Helpdesk | 74** |
| Number of respondents to 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' | 1463 |

Summary of this report

- The Students' Union Helpdesk received 74 queries between 1st and 23rd July 2021. Many of these queries were sent to our Advice Centre for direct support or self-help through our resources on the website.
- The Students' Union Advice Centre received 77 new cases between 1st and 27th July 2021. Due to the time of year, majority of these cases were related to academic issues including appeals, complaints, academic conduct, or withdrawals.
- Our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' survey found that students are interested and want the University to continue to provide learning materials available digitally, recorded lectures, or extended exams. Respondents were less interested in virtual labs, virtual placements, or online seminars. Furthermore, respondents were asked to share one thing that would have improved this academic year and, when thematically analysed, the top three themes were: virtual learning issues; communication with their course; and pedagogy issues.

Monthly Statistics from the Students' Union

This month, our Helpdesk received 74 queries between 1st and 23rd of July 2021. Of these, 28 students were referred on for help through our Advice Centre or shown the self-help resources on the Advice Centre site. Other student questions were related to societies (n=9), students wanting to purchase SHU merchandise or to look around the building (n=7), or seeking support from other teams within the Students' Union (e.g. representation, research, or volunteering).

The Advice Centre received 77 new, individual queries. As mentioned above, some of these were also signposted from our Helpdesk. The majority of these were related to academic issues: 10 appeals, 7 complaints, 6 academic conduct, and 6 withdrawals. The Advice Centre also had 9 enquires related to repairs and disrepairs in their accommodation and 4 related to funding checks. Please note, some of these enquiries cover multiple issues.

Hallam, How Are We Doing? Results

As was shared in our [May Monthly Report](#), as well as our [2020/21 Student Voice Report](#), our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' survey asked students to share how the previous academic year was. Firstly, respondents were asked to indicate from a list of different methods their course might have put in place in the 2020/21 academic year, which their course did put into place. Of those that had the method, which would students want to see continued. As Table 2 indicates, respondents were more likely to indicate that they want their **learning materials available digitally** (84%), **recorded lectures** (78%), or **extended deadlines** (75%). Conversely, over 1000 respondents had online seminars, but only 32% of those students would like to see **online seminars** continue. Similarly, respondents were less interested in **virtual placements or internships** (32%) or **virtual labs** (28%).

Table 2: Methods used for teaching during 2020/21 academic year, including count of respondents to survey that had and would want to see these methods continued in future.

| <i>"Of the measures your course did, what would you like to see continue?"</i> | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Method | Had | Wants to see continued | % |
| All of my learning materials available digitally | 1204 | 1017 | 84% |
| Recorded lectures | 1129 | 879 | 78% |
| Extended deadlines | 591 | 443 | 75% |
| Online, open book exams | 534 | 361 | 68% |
| Online discussion boards or forums on your course | 633 | 372 | 59% |
| Virtual meetings or check-ins with lecturers or tutors | 737 | 410 | 56% |
| Online lectures | 1258 | 543 | 43% |
| Virtual placements or internships | 146 | 47 | 32% |
| Online seminars | 1107 | 351 | 32% |
| Virtual labs | 202 | 56 | 28% |

Similarly as discussed by [Jim Dickinson in a recent WonkHE article](#), students want aspects of 'blended learning' to continue post pandemic. Our 'Hallam, How Are We Doing?' survey also asked students to tell us one thing that could have been improved, thinking about their learning and course experience this academic year overall. Three main themes were identified through the thematic analysis of 1355 comments.

Virtual learning issues

Throughout the three colleges, Social Sciences and Arts students reported the most issues with virtual learning: **153** students within the college's courses reported issues with virtual learning compared, **118** students from Business Technology and Engineering, and **87** of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences reported issues. Students seem to see virtual learning spaces as a prerequisite for the 'real thing' – the possibility of being on campus, students working directly with peers, and having face-to-face contact time with tutors. Some students feel like they **did not receive the 'full package' of the university experience**. Respondents who raised concerns about virtual learning spoke of feeling **'unmotivated' to learn**. One student summed up the issue succinctly:

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"...but the problem was with me being unmotivated and as excited I was to study online, I got quite disappointed because it is a huge difference from studying online to actually going to your classes, talk to your mates and teachers anytime, being just present and see everyone working."

Sub-themes within the Virtual Learning Issues theme includes: wellbeing, academic support, and access to resources whilst learning online. If students do not have access to materials/resources that will help them navigate VLE platforms, students can feel isolated and helpless.

"a little more help. As like I said I know it's been hard with COVID-19 and I'm just being honest, also I get you have to learn as an adult, but some things have been hard to learn for yourself; learning the content, having nobody to talk too! Being a single parent and learning as well as teaching a child at home! Overall, the university have done what they could have but, communication and self-directed learning could have been improved".

Finally, other issues surrounding virtual learning were largely due to **technological issues** such as internet issues, zoom waiting rooms and breakout spaces not working properly. Students from most courses did not see breakout rooms as a sufficient learning space due to a lack of incentive for students to engage in seminar.

Communication within course

Throughout the three colleges, Social Sciences and Arts students reported the most issues with communication with fellow students and academic staff. As mentioned prior, students largely attributed the university's virtual learning platforms as a potential reason for this. **A lack of face-to-face contact led some students to feel isolated.** Respondents also spoke of a lack of a standardised approach to asking questions regarding assessment and modular content.

Blackboard was raised several times in relation to the uneven dissemination of information regarding course content and assessment information. Respondents also felt that **lecturers did not respond 'fast enough' to emails** or other correspondence. Students would like to feel like they have a 'connection' to their studies in order to feel valued. Students succeed both academically and socially when they feel the conditions of their learning environment meet their needs.

"The connection between lecturers and students, it's like we've been in different worlds this year. I don't feel like a student I feel like a student number required to perform but without an identity as efforts to build positive relationships with us have been very minimal. When you don't feel like your lecturers care about you because you're just another student number and an then further feel like an inconvenience/annoyance when they don't reply."

Pedagogical Issues

Out of the 226 respondents who claimed pedagogical issues were something that can be improved on their course, 97 were from the SSA college, 71 respondents were from BTE college and 50 from HWLS college. **Group work** was mentioned several times as an issue based on students 'not pulling their weight' - some students were putting in a disproportionate amount of work compared to their group members. This is not a 'new' issue, however, students believe breakout rooms and other virtual solutions to create grouped assessment made the situation worse.

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There were several comments about modules and content that would not be useful outside the realm of university. Therefore students (mostly on vocational courses) questioned whether content would be useful in their respective working environments. Both students and staff had to adjust to a completely new learning environment, with new technological upskilling and development. For students, this meant learning new skills and technology whilst also keeping on top of their studies. Students mentioned that content online was **not as engaging through a screen**.

Although pedagogical issues were a dominant theme, comments surrounding specific teaching techniques were limited. Students were more concerned with their inability to engage with teaching and learning off campus. If students were able to spend more time on campus, this would not have been a dominant theme and is reflective of the current environment.

END.