

# NSS Response

2018



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All information correct  
at the time of going to  
print September 2018

# Introduction

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Welcome to Imperial College Union's eighth annual National Student Survey (NSS) Response, an exercise made possible by the strong partnership between the Union and College.

Firstly, thank you to all of the outgoing Undergraduate students who filled out the NSS survey. Your feedback provides a critical insight into the educational experience that Imperial offers, allowing members at all levels to identify strengths and weaknesses in their areas of provision, meaning that the students following in your footsteps get to have an even better Imperial experience.

The NSS scores across Imperial have dropped in every category from last year. Fortunately, Imperial has several high scoring departments leading the way providing examples of best-practice for all to benefit from. Sharing this best practice via partnerships within and across departments will lead to significant improvements in the student experience in all areas.

Imperial College Union and College enjoy a strong collaborative relationship, working together on several initiatives such as The Imperial Award and StudentShapers for the benefit of our shared student membership. Furthermore, all over Imperial, students and staff are working to improve their courses as well as provide enhanced support, events and resources for the communities in their



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departments. This year, building on the theme of partnership from previous NSS responses, we have decided to focus this response on active partnership, which is why this NSS response is a little different.

Imperial College Union and College are at the point where they should not just identify areas requiring work, but commit to working on them in partnership to bring Imperial to a new world-leading standard in educational experience. In light of this, the section recommendations have been replaced by recommended actions which are shaped to include elements of the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound) framework where possible to enable swift and straightforward action. Where appropriate, key partners to be involved in executing the recommended actions have been suggested.

I would like to thank Fran and Leigh from the Education & Welfare team for tirelessly pouring through the NSS data and writing this document with me. I would also like to thank College and all departments for implementing several of the recommendations from previous NSS responses.

## How to use this document

The purpose of the recommended actions in this document are to aid all key stakeholders including course leaders, departments, student representative teams, Departmental Societies, Constituent Unions, Faculties, College and Imperial College Union to form active partnerships with the aim of addressing shortcomings in the experience being provided to students. With this in mind, we would like to suggest a methodology for implementation:

▲ Each department should use the NSS data to reflect on their performance over past years. As a minimum, all sections where the score has declined or is below average should be chosen as sections to implement the recommended actions.

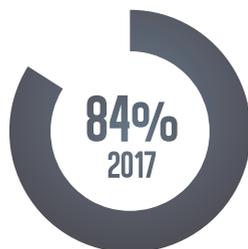
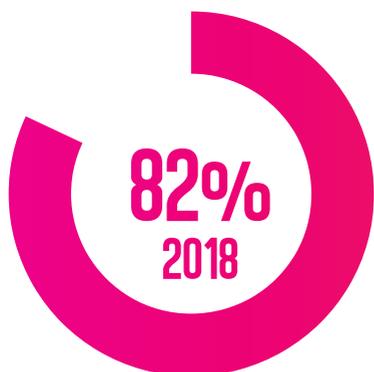
We look forward to partnering with College, especially at a departmental level, to embed these recommended actions as mechanisms for positive change for the benefit of both staff and students.

▲ Departments should seek partnerships to achieve their goals particularly with stakeholders that they have not previously worked well with or at all.

▲ The relevant partners should form an action plan outlining how they will implement the chosen recommended actions fully and sustainably in the 2018-19 academic year.



# Teaching



**84%**  
Sector  
Average

College's commitment to provide a world class learning experience for Imperial students manifests through the *Learning and Teaching Strategy (LTS)*, now in its second year of implementation. Despite this, since 2016, the score for student satisfaction in the teaching category has decreased by 3%, and is below the sector and Russell Group averages by 2%.

**84%**  
Russell Group  
Average

The overwhelming majority of comments in this section related to the inconsistency in the quality of teaching across modules and lecturers, with lecturer enthusiasm identified as a critical trait. This was closely followed by students saying that they felt ill-prepared to use the software tools that they were expected to use as part of their course and in future employment. By applying the recommended actions in this section, in conjunction with the LTS and the expertise of our world-class staff and cutting edge research, we can push Imperial back to the forefront of teaching provision.

'Staff have made the subject interesting' was the lowest scoring question of the section at 75%, a decline of 5% from the score in 2017, and significantly below the sector average this year of 82%. By implementing the first recommended action, staff who are identified by students as those who require improvements to their teaching will be supported by senior staff within the department to develop their teaching abilities, approaches to assessment or methods of delivery. In some cases, development opportunities may already be available to teaching staff, but are not utilised effectively. By promoting staff engagement with development opportunities, engaging and intellectually stimulating teaching will be delivered across all modules, leading to students who are more satisfied with their education experience.

## Recommended Action

Department leadership to identify at least one staff member with low scores on SOLE per term and facilitate relevant training and development opportunities for them to improve the quality of teaching in their module. Departments should consider partnering high scoring staff with low scoring staff to help them shape their courses and teaching.



A small number of lecturers are beginning to experiment with alternatives to traditional lectures with generally very good results.

ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC  
ENGINEERING STUDENT



Furthermore, the SOLE feedback is often not acted upon appropriately, with very unpopular lecturers still being allowed to teach the course year after year despite the majority of students complaining about their inadequacy for the position.

PHYSICS STUDENT

With the *Curriculum Review* in full swing, there is a huge opportunity to embed more practical and digital means of learning and teaching in curriculums. Students raised concerns throughout the comments about the insufficient teaching and real-life application of software and programmes necessary for future employment in industry. This also links closely to the *Learning Opportunities* section whereby students highlighted their disappointment with the lack of opportunities to apply learning to 'real-life' workplace scenarios. The embedding of such practical skills development throughout a degree will empower students to feel confident in their ability to apply such skills and knowledge to their future careers or postgraduate studies, and set them apart from other graduates as experts in use of digital tools.

## Recommended Action

Use the *Curriculum Review, Learning and Teaching Strategy* and students as partners to embed more teaching on relevant, cutting-edge software and programs within courses to prepare students for practical use of digital tools in future employment.



Intellectually stimulating and good opportunities for real life application in the final year modules.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT



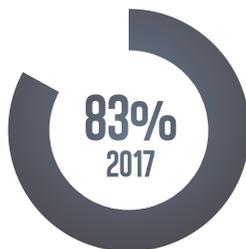
While we had introductions to CAD, CFD, and FE software, the course could have done much more to develop our ability to understand and use these tools, especially given that this knowledge is beneficial for internships and full-time jobs.

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



# Learning Opportunities

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**83%**  
Sector  
Average

**80%**  
Russell Group  
Average

Imperial College is internationally recognised as an excellent institution. Therefore students apply with the expectation that they will have an enriching learning experience with opportunities to learn what they need to for their future careers. The drop in score in this section to below both sector and Russell group averages, as well as the notable disparity in student satisfaction across departments, indicates that this is an area where many departments should focus their attention.

The *Learning & Teaching Strategy* sets out ambitious goals for reviewing curriculums and presenting innovative opportunities for students to learn beyond their discipline. Embedding the recommended actions in this section will lead to students graduating from Imperial with the confidence that they are prepared with the range of skills that employers require.

A repeated theme identified in the student comments was modular choices. Students reported positively their experiences of being able to select modules of interest to them from outside of their degree area, particularly from departments offering a wide range of interdisciplinary module choices. However, many students felt that this occurred too late in their degrees or the module subject range was severely limited.

Students will be more motivated and inspired to learn concepts in depth when they feel that they have autonomy over what they learn. The pioneering departments in this area who offer a wide range of module choices in both third and fourth years have proven that; enabling students to extend their learning beyond their chosen discipline leads to graduates who are not only confident in their in depth understanding of their degree subject, but also in their critical transferrable skills.

## Recommended Action

Ensure that a wide range of elective modules from both within and outside of the core subject area are available to every student at Imperial as part of their course, so that they can adapt their own learning experience to suit their needs and interests.



I have loved the range of courses and the choice in the last two years, which gave me the chance to expand my knowledge in areas I am interested in.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT



I was forced to take course modules which are not really related to my interests and goals and I never ever need after taking the module.

Students reported that they strongly value the expertise of teaching staff and the challenge to learn complex theories and concepts, but lack opportunities to apply the knowledge they acquired, removing the chance to test and embed their understanding. Often this was not due to insufficient opportunities, but to an overbearing workload that forced students to rush through their coursework and not spend enough time experimenting and reflecting on what they had done.

The curriculum review provides an opportunity to embed practical learning of key concepts as well as remove barriers (such as clashing deadlines or excessive workload), which will enable students to commit what they have learnt to long term memory via practical application and reflection.

## Recommended Action

Use the curriculum review and students as partners to design and incorporate more opportunities for students to practically apply the theory they have learned with facilitated reflection to aid long term learning.



Much of the coursework and projects (group or individual) were technically demanding but also very fun and interesting as they directly require you to apply the material taught in lectures.

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT

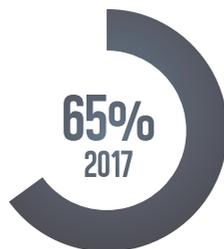


I feel the learning experience is driven more by the learn/regurgitate process and less by actually understanding the concept and applying your knowledge. ... I have to say I don't think I have learnt a great deal of useful skills from Imperial with most of my improvement/change coming from things outside of University.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT



# Assessment & Feedback



73%  
Sector  
Average

68%  
Russell Group  
Average

College has declined in satisfaction in this area by 1% since 2017 and continue to trail behind the Sector Average by 9%. Furthermore, the significant spread in department scores for this section show the inconsistency across Imperial, with some departments such as *Earth Science and Engineering* scoring more than double the score of other departments. According to a plethora of student comments, students across Imperial are dissatisfied with the lack of clear marking criteria for assessment and therefore their inhibited ability to strive for excellence. This also causes disparities between markers expectations, with contradicting feedback being presented to students. Another strong theme established in the comments is the poor timeliness and lack of detailed feedback on coursework, as well as a lack of feedback altogether on exams. By implementing the recommended actions in this section, as well as learning from departments who scored highly, below average departments will regain their student's confidence and satisfaction in the assessment and feedback processes.

Section 5 of the Learning and Teaching Strategy states that the College will: “Communicate clearly the ways in which every assignment aligns with module learning outcomes and how these relate to programme outcomes; and aligning feedback strategy for support” and that college will be able to evidence “availability of marking schemes and past exam papers for all coursework and exams”. This highlights that College is aware of the importance of providing comprehensive assessment criteria to students, enabling them to enhance their academic ability and produce high-calibre work.

To achieve these desired outcomes, we propose that departments facilitate regular reviews of the marking criteria within their modules. This would ensure that all criteria for assessment is clear and wholly prepares students to achieve their best results and avoid disparities in assessment feedback.

## Recommended Action

Departments should regularly review marking criteria to ensure it is comprehensive, transparent and aligned with the module and course learning outcomes to allow students to strive for excellence in assessment and reduce inconsistencies in marker feedback.



I really value the transparency of marking and assessment.  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENT



Feedback is none uniform, what one-marker likes another will not. I found comments upon receipt of a piece of coursework and when I compared this to a colleague found I had gained 10 marks for ‘referencing the lecturer’, when they had lost 10 marks for the same thing. This kind of ludicrous lack of mark schemes and uniform marking leads to a feeling of chaos to coursework and negatively impacts the amount of effort people put in.

The Learning and Teaching Strategy states that the College will establish an enabling approach to assessment and feedback by: "Actively building recognition amongst students that making mistakes is a helpful part of learning, and supporting students to develop personal strategies for learning from errors that enable the development of creative, progressive solutions".

Students need constructive and helpful feedback in order for them to develop a personal strategy to learn from their mistakes, but are being denied that feedback on the most intense and comprehensive evaluation of their knowledge, exams. A large proportion of student responses in the NSS emphasise this issue, particularly as the current methods of receiving feedback on exams are purposely opaque and/or too general to be of much benefit.

Administrative burden or fear of an increase in appeals are not sufficient reasons to deny students this avenue of feedback. Employing this recommended action will lead to students receiving helpful feedback especially during their formative years of study and, if implemented together with the above recommended action regarding clear marking criteria, should not lead to an undue increase in the number of appeals.

## Recommended Action

College should reflect on the underutilised opportunity to give critical feedback via exam scripts and should develop a system by which students can easily access their past exam scripts to allow them to review and reflect on their mistakes and develop their academic ability for future assessment and employment.



I really wish we can get feedback from exams or more feedback on our performance from coursework, in order to be able to identify our strengths and weaknesses in the subject.

CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDENT



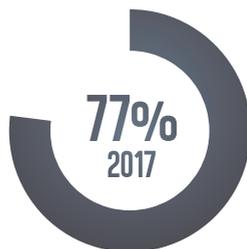
The college is extremely secretive with exam feedback, not providing any individual feedback and not allowing students to access a marked copy of their exam, probably due to fears of accusations of careless marking.

PHYSICS STUDENT



# Academic Support

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**80%**  
Sector  
Average

**76%**  
Russell Group  
Average

College's recent *Student Support Strategy* is a welcomed commitment to increase student support provision, and will no doubt have a deep impact on the student experience at Imperial. However, further changes are required to halt the downward trend in score for this section that has persisted from 83% in 2015 to 75% this year, which has placed Imperial firmly below both the sector and Russell group averages.

Several comments praised exemplary lecturers and student-facing staff who make an effort to listen to and support their students in their decisions. Also, academic tutorials were highly popular, with several students saying that they were one of the best aspects about their learning experience at Imperial. However, the overwhelming majority of negative student comments about this section were about the huge inconsistency in personal tutor performance, followed closely by insufficient advice on how to manage the heavy workload.

*Academic Development* and *Discussing Second and Final Year Choices* are two core areas highlighted as Personal Tutor responsibilities on the Personal Tutor's guide provided by College. In spite of this, a huge number of students spoke of their mediocre or often non-existent relationship with their personal tutor, meaning that many Imperial students are not receiving the academic advice and support that they should. This was reflected in the score breakdown for this section, where the statement "good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course" was the lowest score at 68%.

No student coming to Imperial College should have to deal with a negative relationship that is detrimental to their wellbeing and their academic experience, which is why Imperial College Union strongly suggests that College, Faculties and Departments acknowledge this significant issue and take appropriate measures to rectify it. Both College and the Imperial College Union would like to see every student receiving world class academic support alongside their world-class learning and implementing this recommended action will be a strong step in the right direction.

## Recommended Action

College should review the effectiveness of the personal tutor system and make appropriate changes to the structure and tutor selection and training processes to ensure that all students are receiving equally good academic support.



I was very lucky with my supervisor, he/she has helped me massively throughout my degree, and however this is not the case with many other students that meet their supervisors once or twice a year.

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Another crucial part of the degree and similarly a matter of pure luck is the Personal Tutor system. Some students, such as I, have been assigned to uncaring, useless tutors. These assignments may induce dramatic consequences on the students, in terms of overview of the degree, advice, discussion, health and of course, application for further study and employment.

PHYSICS STUDENT

Course loads are being refined across Imperial as part of the Curriculum Review, however the intense workload involved as part of studying at Imperial may continue to be a cause of stress for students, negatively affecting their health and ability to learn. In order to excel at Imperial, students should receive appropriate advice on how to manage their workloads and prioritise effectively to avoid unnecessary stress.

Imperial College Union would like to see all students well equipped with the resources and advice to effectively manage their workload and learn efficiently. Moreover, students should be encouraged to take time to engage with activities outside of their course, and guided in how to self-reflect to identify personal signs of stress and overexertion caused by academic workload.

## Recommended Action

Departments offering courses with several modules, projects and tasks in parallel should offer active advice and support specifically for managing and prioritising workload as part of the core provision, particularly to incoming students.



Very challenging degree but great support and guidance when you need it.

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



The transition from pre-university into university first year lacked support. Staff could have given more guidance on study habits and coursework preparation.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENT



# Organisation & Management

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**75%**  
Sector  
Average

**75%**  
Russell Group  
Average

For Organisation and Management, Imperial scored a 75% in overall satisfaction, matching both the Sector and Russell Group Average for 2018. Throughout the comments, many students made reference to the benefits that well-structured courses, curriculums and timetables had on their learning and well-being.

However, the percentage dropped by 3% from previous years. The comments within this section identified issues such as; poor communication between teaching staff which results in duplication of course content; and timetabling issues causing multiple deadlines at once and therefore an unmanageable workload. Imperial is a complex institution, with faculties and departments operating uniquely to suit the needs of their students, however this should not keep all students from receiving an equally well structured learning experience.

It is clear throughout the NSS data and comments that where students are happy and have a positive work-life balance, they are able to manage and organise their academic responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed. Therefore, in order to effectively support student wellbeing and enhance their experience, consideration must be given to effective timetabling that enables a positive work-life balance.

One of the key themes within the student comments in this area is the avoidable clashing of deadlines, resulting in high stress periods where students have to work extreme hours to complete their assignments. Following the Space Sharing program currently being carried out at Imperial, implementing the following recommended action will be possible, and can become standard practice across Imperial leading to healthier students who are able to excel in their work.

## Recommended Action

Student timetables and curriculums should be planned with student input to ensure that organisers understand the needs of students, ensuring that enough time is available to achieve a manageable work-life balance, avoiding spikes in workload and deadline clashes throughout weeks, terms and across years.



Very student-friendly timetable giving enough time to the students to organize their responsibilities effectively, especially good is the fact that in the final year, we finish with exams first and then we only have the final year project.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT



Organisation of the workload and timetabling are also issues with several pinch-points throughout the year contributing to unhealthy stress levels within the department. Lectures are not evenly distributed throughout the week leading to some long, exhausting days and some where there is little motivation to come in for only one lecture.

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Students come to Imperial expecting a streamlined, coherent and well organised learning experience however student comments revealed that this expectation is not being met. This was reflected in the data; 'The course is well organised and running smoothly' was the lowest scoring statement in this section at 71% satisfaction.

Students were particularly dissatisfied with the apparent lack of communication between lecturers when planning their modules resulting in duplication of content, often several times across different modules. Implementing the second recommended action will mitigate against this issue and avoid valuable staff and student time being wasted.

## Recommended Action

Establish working practices that enable collaborative planning for content within and across modules to minimise the duplication of content.



Well-structured course. Good mixture of topics. Well-spaced workload during the term. Nice varied projects. Some of the most inspiring staff make the most boring topics really interesting.



The course is not cohesive, and there seems to be very little communication between lecturers regarding what has and hasn't been covered in the courses (and the amount of work we get each week.

PHYSICS STUDENT



# Learning Resources

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**85%**  
Sector  
Average

**73%**  
Russell Group  
Average

The *Learning Resources* section consistently produces the highest scores for student satisfaction at Imperial and satisfaction remains higher than both sector and Russell Group averages, a fantastic achievement.

The *Learning & Teaching Strategy* commits to providing state of the art spaces and resources to enable the implementation of innovative teaching methods. For example the Summer Refurbishment project, which is currently revamping sixty one underutilised or underdeveloped spaces across Imperial College campuses, will make a significant improvement to the learning spaces available to our membership. It is evident from student comments that they are becoming increasingly aware of College's efforts to improve space and resource provision. Negative comments related to software and online resources outdated or no longer fit for purpose, as well as the disruptions that construction and refurbishment can have on their studies.

With a growing student community, the demands on space at Imperial are becoming paramount. Student comments demonstrate the pressures that rising student numbers is having on access to suitable work spaces and facilities such as computers.

Extensive work is being undertaken to redesign and develop spaces across Imperial to address the needs of students, such as the Library. Although the value of these works are widely recognised, students have reported being disadvantaged during times when spaces are made unavailable and no contingency has been arranged or communicated to ensure that students are not impeded in their work. By considering the first recommended action in this section, College will ensure that making improvements to the resources and spaces available for future students will not come at the expense of the current students' experience.

## Recommended Action

When space or resources become unavailable, contingencies should be clearly planned and communicated to students so that their studies are unimpeded.



The teaching and study spaces available in my department are very good, but space is a huge issue for most students at Imperial.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Construction works carried out around the school has resulted in overcrowding and greatly over-shared resources, like space, lab assets and time. These should be planned more carefully in steps that coincide with our breaks to prevent disruption, along with hopefully other solutions.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

The LTS describes the future of innovative learning at Imperial as “blended learning, online and digital technology can replace lectures and classroom time can be used for interactive education experiences”.

Imperial, being a research and technology focused institution, should naturally have the best facilities and resources in the world, as well as cutting edge course content. However, student comments indicated that often supplementary resources both online and material were often outdated and in some cases, irrelevant to their fast moving subject area.

It goes without question that in order to keep our graduates prepared for their careers, Imperial must provide them with an education that maintains their knowledge and skills at the forefront of their subject areas.

## Recommended Action

In conjunction with the curriculum review, departments should identify where learning resources, both online and physical are outdated and seek to develop and maintain them at the cutting-edge.



Good online resources made learning from home and very easy to do. All lectures are records which means if you miss a day or want to clarify something/have more time to go over it and write it down you can watch it in your own time.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENT

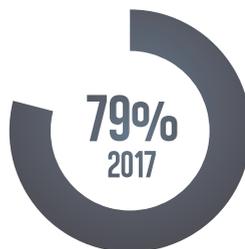


Resources are not easily available to help the students in what they are trying to complete. The course is extremely outdated and does not reflect the state-of-the-art.

ELECTRIC AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING STUDENT



# Learning Community



**77%**  
Sector  
Average

This section is now in its second year and, despite a 3% rise in the Russell group average from 2017, remains above the Russell group average. However, our institutional score dropped by 3% from last year, and fell below the sector average, indicating that further work is required to improve learning communities at Imperial.

**73%**  
Russell Group  
Average

The *Learning and Teaching Strategy* states that feeling like part of an academic community enables student learning. Fostering a tightly-knit community should therefore be a priority within departments, as it will have positive effects on staff and students alike. A breakdown of the two individual question scores for this section provides an insight into areas for improvement. The statement “I feel part of a community of staff and students” had much lower agreement scores of 68% and 64% in 2017 and 2018 respectively whereas “I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.” scored much more highly at 90 % and 89 % in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

In their comments, students highlighted that when staff make an effort to get to know them, they feel better supported and more part of a community. The comments also suggested that where a department works together with their department society to offer inclusive events where staff and students can meet and get to know one another hierarchical barriers are broken down which creates opportunities for improved support as well as collaboration.

The first recommended action in this section provides practical guidance on how to start developing a strong staff-student community. Imperial College Union is ready to work in partnership with departments and department societies in developing a community where their students and staff feel at home, and are excited to work together.

## Recommended Action

All departments should partner with their department societies to offer at least one event per term where students and key staff members can informally meet to foster a more equal and collaborative community. Department leadership should encourage staff to engage with the events.



The recent staff-student dinners/ events were really good and helped to make the staff seem more like real people as well as giving us the staff viewpoint on various aspects of the course which we wouldn't normally get.

AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



Really lacking a sense of community. I feel that there is a clear divide between staff and students. I don't feel I know any of the staff at all.

PHYSICS STUDENT

Whereas a few students cited a competitive culture within their cohorts as a something which pushed them to do their best, most student comments about competitive cultures stated that it was a negative and detrimental aspect of their time at Imperial, leading to unnecessary stress and isolation.

Comments also highlighted that, where departments and department societies foster strong peer-to-peer support networks and encourage collaborative extra-curricular activities, strong communities form which leads to a positive student experience.

Implementing this recommended action will help identify whether students are being encouraged to collaborate or compete and will enable departments to adjust their strategy accordingly, to ensure that students are not being isolated or taken advantage of by their peers. This will also help departments to identify whether or not they are providing sufficient support to students who do not deal well with competition.

## Recommended Action

Departments who have identified that they have a competitive working environment (using their NSS data) should write an action plan with their student representatives and department societies on how and when they will run events or create support structures focused on collaboration and improving the departmental community.



The community within my degree is really second to none. I can't name any other university or subject where everyone values each other as much as we do.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

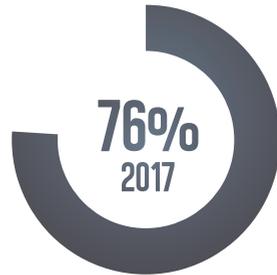


...at times, the people on the course can be extremely competitive which creates an unnerving environment where you constantly think you're not good enough.

CIVIL ENGINEERING STUDENT



# Student Voice



**69%**  
Sector  
Average

**66%**  
Russell Group  
Average

Imperial College has again scored above the sector and Russell group averages in this section this year. This indicates that students feel that they have ample opportunities to express their voice and that their feedback is valued compared to other institutions. However, there is always room for improvement, especially with the score falling 3 points from 2017. The lowest scoring questions in this section were “It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on” and “The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests” at 71% and 56% respectively.

Imperial College Union and College have a shared responsibility to ensure that the feedback from our membership is heard and acted upon. Through effective active partnership, both bodies can continue to make improvements in this area, ever moving towards an Imperial where students are seen as

There are so many mechanisms by which students can provide feedback on their experience during their time at Imperial including the Academic Representation Network, SOLE, Student Staff Committees, Surveys etc. yet student comments often mentioned that their feedback is not valued or taken into consideration. This suggests that there are significant barriers in the process inhibiting feedback from being acted upon. These will be different for each department, and may range from unenthusiastic staff to a lack of an appropriate process to ensure that feedback leads to appropriate action.

By implementing this recommended action, departments will be able to partner with Imperial College Union in identifying the pitfalls and barriers in the feedback process, leading to an improved feedback situation where students are valued and listened to as partners in their education.

## Recommended Action

Departments struggling with low scores in this category should collaborate with Imperial College Union to form an action plan before the start of 2019 outlining how they will actively remove barriers to student feedback as well as engage with and support student representatives in their roles.



The department take our feedback very seriously and you can see the changes they implement within the following year.

ELECTIRCAL AND ELECTRONIC  
ENGINEERING STUDENT



My opinions and feedback about my course are not welcomed, and are an inconvenience; something to be ignored in the hope that they go away. I do not feel as if anything I say will ever be acted upon.

PHYSICS STUDENT

There are countless cases across Imperial of staff and students working together to make improvements based on student feedback, but far fewer cases where the change agents effectively “close the feedback loop”. This is the critical final step in the feedback cycle that is often overlooked, leading to a vicious cycle of low motivation among students to engage with feedback mechanisms and increased discontent with the status quo. This was reflected in student comments, where it was evident that students in the same departments had different ideas about how their feedback was acted upon.

This recommended action builds upon the recommendation from the NSS response in 2017 “Departments should ensure they close the feedback loop, informing students of steps taken (or not) following their feedback” reinforcing the benefits that such an approach will have.

## Recommended Action

College and departments should clearly publicise changes made based on student feedback. This will encourage younger years to engage in feedback mechanisms and accelerate positive change.



The department responded well to feedback given by students during the course, for example assessed work was marked more quickly and exam marking made more transparent.

MATHEMATICS STUDENT



...we don't get a clear list of improvements following student feedback, and these results in students not knowing what has changed.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Imperial College Union is proud of its Representation Networks as platforms for students to voice their concerns, complaints or ideas. Furthermore, The Unions 370+ societies offer a range of extracurricular opportunities for students to form communities and bond with their peers over common interests.

The Union must work to maintain focus on its students, updating outdated systems and structures, providing relevant opportunities, and continuously striving for transparency in every aspect solely for the benefit of the membership.

By implementing this recommended action, students will become more aware of the services and opportunities that Imperial College Union provides and will further benefit from its activities.

## Recommended Action

Imperial College Union should realign its governing structures, networks and processes to guarantee that our membership's interests are at the heart of every activity that we do, and communicate the improvements that are made clearly to our membership.



The Student Union and clubs have let me discover my voice in the world and learn to express it and to promote myself in elections, as a shy person that was an amazing step for me.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT



The Student Union makes decisions based on self-interest towards the Union.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT



# Wellbeing

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Whilst analysing the data in depth, it was made clear that many students utilise the NSS as a way of feeding back their experience of their own and others' wellbeing whilst at Imperial. In the past, the NSS response has not explicitly addressed the wellbeing related feedback from students as there is no specific question within the NSS dedicated to this. However, with the sheer number of comments embedded in the data this year we believe it is important to address the raised issues through this response and recommend actions to tackle them.

There was an overwhelming concern around student mental health in particular, both in the causes and lack of support. Many students expressed that they required access to counselling services yet were deterred by extensive waiting periods, and felt that personal tutors are not well-equipped to deal with pastoral issues.

The impact of student wellbeing on their educational experience at Imperial cannot be understated. Our students must be adequately supported to cope with the stresses of intense workloads, a competitive environment and tight deadlines.



The department welfare team is very helpful when problems arise, although first point of call (personal tutors) could be made more approachable in some cases. Once a problem is passed to the welfare team, they dealt with it smoothly and with the minimal amount of stress, which was much appreciated as it was around exam time too.

PHYSICS STUDENT



I struggled to find where to get help from the Mental Health Service. It took me a number of months to get an appointment, and by then I had already had to struggle through exams with no support and being completely isolated.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Imperial are already taking steps to better support student wellbeing across College with the introduction of the Student Support Strategy and through listening to student feedback and making improvements to the counselling service. The comments in the NSS data made it abundantly clear that students value good support from personal tutors, department staff and often their peers. It is therefore increasingly important that staff and students at all levels engage fully with the strategy when it is launched and make a conscious effort to actively support student mental health and wellbeing.

## Recommended Action

All members of staff should be strongly encouraged to engage with the Student Support Strategy to discover how they can do their part, and prioritise student mental health and wellbeing within their roles.



The college itself has a serious problem with mental health support mechanisms — if a student urgently needs help, it can often take up to six weeks to get an appointment with a mental health professional. My personal tutor experience was awful. After first year, I heard nothing from his/her... The department did not allocate me a new tutor and there were times when I definitely needed some guidance and I had no point of contact except the senior tutor. Sometimes one needs to be asked how they're doing rather than having to reach out for help.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT



Stress, Depression and Anxiety are words which have become common for students and the department does not seem interested in either lessening the burden or providing adequate tools for the student to cope.

PHYSICS STUDENT

In the 2017/18 academic year, Imperial College Union launched a new initiative called the Wellbeing Representation Network. The network aims to mirror the Academic Representation Network by electing students who will represent the voice of students within their cohort and be able to appropriately signpost their peers to internal and external support services. The networks main focus is wellbeing related issues such as; Health, Financial Concerns, Relationships, Equality & Diversity and Personal Safety.

Wellbeing reps are in a unique position to gather feedback from cohorts on a wide scale, to inform Imperial College Union and the College on relevant issues regarding student wellbeing. They also hold the role of being an impartial party available for signposting students to different services available.

## Recommended Action

Departments should engage with the Wellbeing Representative Network and Imperial College Union to ensure students are aware of who their reps are, what their roles entail and how they can increase awareness on key issues by campaigning.



Not enough support to ensure that pupils are not struggling with depression and other mental health issues. There are workshops, but especially when they are stressed, students are unlikely to attend.

COMPUTING STUDENT



There's hardly any staff in the university cares about the students' personal development. The personal tutor system won't work unless the university, the department and the personal tutors themselves have put enough attention on it.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT



I have seen so many of my cohort drop out/fail not due to lack of intelligence or potential but from lack of care, community and support from the department.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT



Many of us feel like just another number on a page and that the department and the college as a whole don't prioritise our health.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

# Vital Statistics

Metric	2018 score	2017 score	Imperial College Union recommended action
<b>Teaching</b>	82%	84%	<p>1) Department leadership to identify at least one staff member with low scores on SOLE per term and facilitate relevant training and development opportunities for them to improve the quality of teaching in their module. Departments should consider partnering high scoring staff with low scoring staff to help them shape their courses and teaching.</p> <p>2) Use the <i>Curriculum Review, Learning and Teaching Strategy</i> and students as partners to embed more teaching on relevant, cutting-edge software and programs within courses to prepare students for practical use of digital tools in future employment.</p>
<b>Learning Opportunities</b>	80%	82%	<p>3) Ensure that a wide range of elective modules from both within and outside of the core subject area are available to every student at Imperial as part of their course, so that they can adapt their own learning experience to suit their needs and interests.</p> <p>4) Use the curriculum review and students as partners to design and incorporate more opportunities for students to practically apply the theory they have learned with facilitated reflection to aid long term learning.</p>
<b>Assessment and Feedback</b>	64%	65%	<p>5) Departments should regularly review marking criteria to ensure it is comprehensive, transparent and aligned with the module and course learning outcomes to allow students to strive for excellence in assessment and reduce inconsistencies in marker feedback.</p> <p>6) College should reflect on the underutilised opportunity to give critical feedback via exam scripts and should develop a system by which students can easily access their past exam scripts to allow them to review and reflect on their mistakes and develop their academic ability for future assessment and employment.</p>
<b>Academic Support</b>	75%	77%	<p>7) College should review the effectiveness of the personal tutor system and make appropriate changes to the structure and tutor selection and training processes to ensure that all students are receiving equally good academic support.</p> <p>8) Departments offering courses with several modules, projects and tasks in parallel should offer active advice and support specifically for managing and prioritising workload as part of the core provision, particularly to incoming students.</p>
<b>Organisation and Management</b>	75%	78%	<p>9) Establish working practices that enable collaborative planning for content within and across modules to minimise the duplication of content.</p>

<b>Organisation and Management</b>	75%	78%	10) Student timetables and curriculums should be planned with student input to ensure that organisers understand the needs of students, ensuring that enough time is available to achieve a manageable work-life balance, avoiding spikes in workload and deadline clashes throughout weeks, terms and across years.
<b>Learning Resources</b>	88%	88%	11) When space or resources become unavailable, contingencies should be clearly planned and communicated to students so that their studies are unimpeded. 12) In conjunction with the curriculum review, departments should identify where learning resources, both online and physical are outdated and seek to develop and maintain them at the cutting-edge.
<b>Learning Community</b>	76%	79%	13) All departments should partner with their department societies to offer at least one event per term where students and key staff members can informally meet to foster a more equal and collaborative community. Department leadership should encourage staff to engage with the events. 14) Departments who have identified that they have a competitive working environment (using their NSS data) should write an action plan with their student representatives and department societies on how and when they will run events or create support structures focused on collaboration and improving the departmental community.
<b>Student Voice</b>	73%	76%	15) Departments struggling with low scores in this category should collaborate with Imperial College Union to form an action plan before the start of 2019 outlining how they will actively remove barriers to student feedback as well as engage with and support student representatives in their roles. 16) College and departments should clearly publicise changes made based on student feedback. This will encourage younger years to engage in feedback mechanisms and accelerate positive change. 17) Imperial College Union should realign its governing structures, networks and processes to guarantee that our membership's interests are at the heart of every activity that we do, and communicate the improvements that are made clearly to our membership.
<b>Wellbeing</b>	-	-	18) All members of staff should be strongly encouraged to engage with the Student Support Strategy to discover how they can do their part, and prioritise student mental health and wellbeing within their roles. 19) Departments should engage with the Wellbeing Representative Network and Imperial College Union to ensure students are aware of who their reps are, what their roles entail and how they can increase awareness on key issues by campaigning.

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