National Students Survey 2017: Summary of College Results

Introduction

1. This paper provides an overview of the College's performance in the National Student Survey (NSS) 2017 at Institutional and Departmental level for the Learning and Teaching Committee.

2. The NSS is an annual survey of final year undergraduate students consisting of two parts: a quantitative survey of 27 questions grouped into nine question categories; and a qualitative free-text section asking students to comment on the positive and negative aspects of their student experience. Within the quantitative survey respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they agree with each question, responding as follows: Definitely Agree; Mostly Agree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Mostly Disagree; or Definitely Disagree. Scores are presented as "Percentage Satisfaction", calculated from the proportion of respondents answering either "Definitely Agree" or "Mostly Agree".

3. The format for the 2017 survey has been revised with two additional Question Categories being introduced, the Student's Union question expanded into a new "Student Voice" category, and a number of questions in the remaining categories updated or introduced. Some categories and questions have also been removed. A full summary of the changes can be found in Annex B.

4. A detailed analysis of the NSS 2017 results can be found in Annex A.

Summary of Key Outcomes

Institutional Level

5. The response rate was 74% with 1,530 total respondents. This compares to 78% in 2016 and a sector wide response rate of 68%.

6. Overall Satisfaction in the College increased by 1 percentage point to 84%.

7. The College's percentage satisfaction improved in a further two question categories: Assessment and Feedback (+3 percentage points to 65%); and Student Voice (+5 percentage points to 76%).

8. Percentage satisfaction fell in two question categories: Teaching (-1 percentage points to 84%); and Learning Resources (-4 percentage points to 88%).

9. The College's percentage satisfaction remained the same in two categories: Academic Support (77%); and Organisation and Management (78%). The College's percentage satisfaction in the two new categories Learning Opportunities and Learning Community were 82% and 79% respectively.

10. Due to an NSS boycott led by the NUS 12 HEIs do not have overall institutional results, although many did appear in certain subject table. A full list of these can be found in Annex A. This should be taken into account when considering movement in ranks.

11. The College ranks 80th in the Sector for Overall Satisfaction (84%), out of the 145 Higher Education Institutions (excluding Further Education Colleges and Alternative/Private Providers) with overall results. This is an increase of 34 places from 114th in 2016. The College remains in the third quartile for Overall Satisfaction in 2017.

12. Of the Russell Group institutions with 2017 results, Durham ranks 1st for Overall Satisfaction (89%). Of the London Group institutions with 2017 results, the Royal Veterinary College ranks 1st for Overall Satisfaction (94%).

13. Despite percentage satisfaction in the Teaching category declining by 1 percentage point, the College's rank increases by 23 places to 86th.

14. The College ranks 16th for Student Voice, an increase of 40 places when compared to the Students' Union Question Category from the 2016 survey, placing the College in the top quartile for this Question Category. Of the other two new Question Categories for 2017, the College ranks 105th in Learning Opportunities and 83rd in the Learning Community (third quartile for each).

15. The College ranks 40th for Learning Resources, down 29 places from 11th and moving it into the second quartile.

16. The College remains in the bottom quartile for Assessment and Feedback and Academic Support.

Department Level

17. Overall satisfaction increased in six Departments in 2017, the largest increases being in Bioengineering (+16 percentage points to 97%) and Materials (+11 percentage points to 87%). Aeronautics, Mechanical Engineering, Medicine and Life Sciences - Biochemistry also saw increases in Overall Satisfaction of at least 3 percentage points. Bioengineering and Earth Science & Engineering had the highest level of overall satisfaction (97% each).

18. Overall satisfaction decreased in seven Departments, the largest decreases being in in Chemistry (-14 percentage points to 73%) and Mathematics (-8 percentage points to 78%).

19. Life Sciences - Biology and Physics maintained their overall satisfaction score between 2016 and 2017.

20. The College ranks in the top quartile for Overall Satisfaction in the NSS Subjects General Engineering (reflecting Bioengineering at the College), Geology (reflecting Earth Science and Engineering), Civil Engineering and Mechanical, Production, Manufacturing Engineering (reflecting Mechanical Engineering).

21. Both Earth Science & Engineering and Mechanical Engineering rank in the top quartile for all but one Question Category in their respective NSS Subjects.

Strategic Planning Division
September 2017

Annex A: Detailed Analysis of NSS 2017 College Results

Institutions without Publishable Overall Results

i. This year, due to an NUS led NSS boycott, the 12 HEIs listed below (eight of which are Russell Group) do not have overall institutional results. This should be taken into account when viewing the College's movement in various rankings. Although these institutions do not have overall results they do appear in certain subject tables, where they have met the publication threshold at subject level (50% response rate and at least 10 respondents).

- Oxford
- Cambridge
- UCL
- King's College London
- Manchester
- Bristol
- Sheffield
- Liverpool
- SOAS
- Courtauld Institute of Art
- Royal Central School of Speech and Drama
- Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Institutional Results

ii. Chart 1 below shows the trend in the College's results in each NSS Question Category between 2013 and 2017. Percentage Satisfaction increased in three Question Categories between 2016 and 2017: Overall Satisfaction (+1 percentage point to 84%); Assessment and Feedback (+3 percentage points to 65%); and Student Voice (+5 percentage points to 76%). The College's percentage satisfaction fell in two categories: Teaching (-1 percentage point to 84%); and Learning Resources (-4 percentage points to 88%).

iii. Two question categories remained level: Academic Support (77%); and Organisation and Management (78%). The College's percentage satisfaction in the two new categories Learning Opportunities and Learning Community were 82% and 79% respectively.

Chart 1: College Trend in Percentage Satisfaction, by NSS Question Category
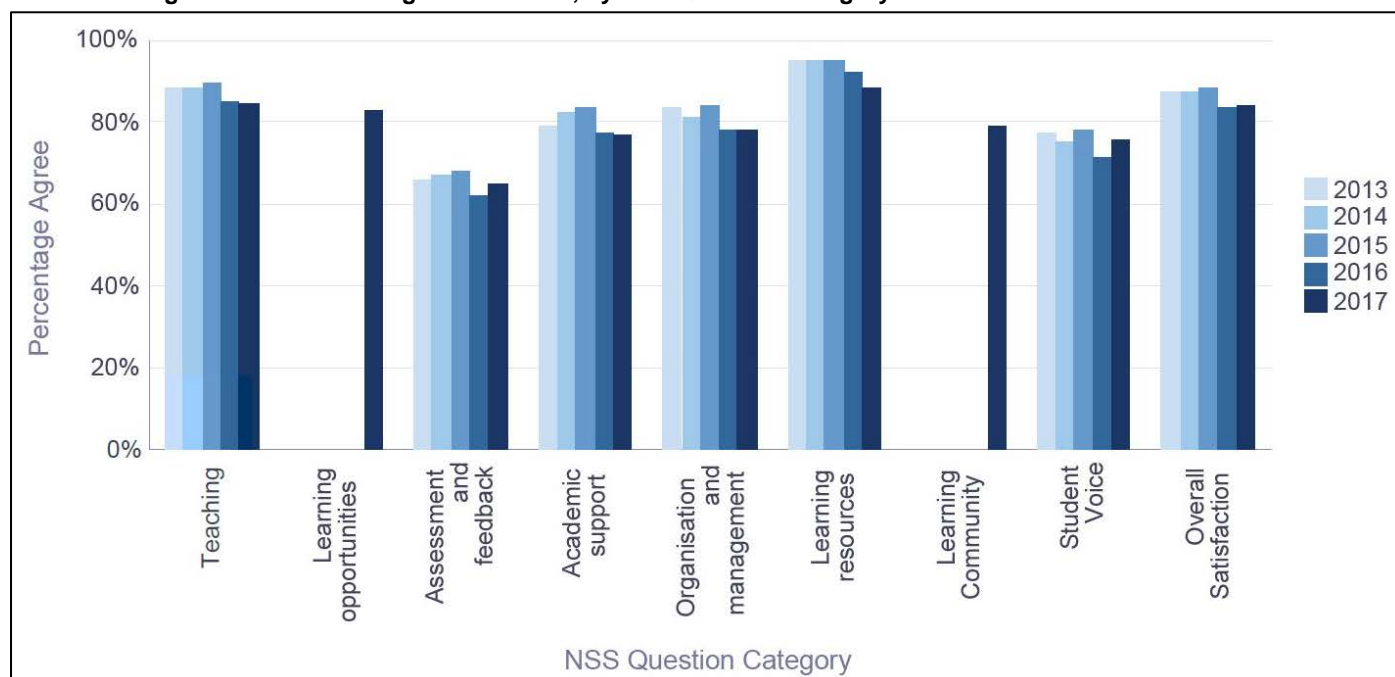
iv.   Table 1 below shows the percentage point change in the College's NSS results since 2015, and provides a comparison to the Sector, Russell Group and London Averages in 2017. It should be noted that in 2017 12 HEIs, including 8 Russell Group institutions, did not meet the publication threshold of a 50% response rate and thus did not have overall results available.

Table 1: College Sector Performance, by NSS Question Category

NSS Question Category	Imperial			Sector Average 2017	Russell Group Average 2017	London Average 2017	Imperial's rank in Sector 2017 (/145)	Imperial's rank in Sector 2016 (/157)
	2017	Δ since 2016	Δ since 2015					
Teaching	84%	-1%	-5%	85%	86%	82%	86	109
Learning Opportunities	82%	n/a	n/a	84%	82%	82%	105	n/a
Assessment & Feedback	65%	+3%	-3%	73%	71%	70%	139	151
Academic Support	77%	0%	-6%	80%	79%	77%	125	141
Organisation & Management	78%	0%	-6%	75%	78%	73%	38	78
Learning Resources	88%	-4%	-7%	85%	87%	85%	40	11
Learning Community	79%	n/a	n/a	77%	77%	75%	83	n/a
Student Voice	76%	+5%	-2%	69%	69%	69%	16	56
Overall Satisfaction	84%	+1%	-4%	84%	86%	81%	80	114

Key

Top Quartile	Second Quartile	Third Quartile	Bottom Quartile

Rankings are now based on scores to 2 decimal places. Prior to this results were only available rounded to the nearest whole number.

v.   Percentage satisfaction for the College is above the Sector Average in the Question Categories: Organisation & Management (3% higher); Learning Resources (3% higher); Learning Community (2% higher); and Student Voice (7% higher). The College is below the Sector Average in: Teaching (1% below); Learning Opportunities (2% below); Assessment & Feedback (8% below); and Academic Support (3% below). For Overall Satisfaction the College is equal to the Sector Average of 84%. The College is above all three of the Sector, Russell Group and London Averages for the Question Categories: Student Voice; Learning Community; and Learning Resources. The College is below all three for Assessment & Feedback.

vi.   The College ranks within the bottom quartile in Assessment & Feedback and Academic Support. Assessment & Feedback continues to be the College's worst performing category. In particular the questions relating to feedback ("Feedback on my work has been timely" and "I have received helpful comments on my work") showed particularly low percentage satisfaction at 62% each. For Learning Resource the College fell 29 places to 40th, moving it from the top to the second quartile. This was driven by a fall in satisfaction within the questions on IT and Library resources ("The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well" and "The library resources have supported my learning well"). It should be noted that the wording for both these questions was revised in 2017, potentially impacting responses negatively. Please see Appendix B for details of the changes.

vii.   The College's Overall Satisfaction improvement resulted in an increase of 34 places to rank 80th.

viii. Of the 16 Russell Group institutions with overall institution results (please see paragraph i for a full list of the institutions which did not meet the threshold) the College ranks 11th for Overall Satisfaction. The University of Durham ranks 1st for Overall Satisfaction within the Russell Group with 89%. The College ranks joint 11th of 29 London institutions with results for Overall Satisfaction. The Royal Veterinary College ranks 1st in London, with an Overall Satisfaction score of 94%.

ix.   Chart 2 overleaf shows the range of institutional scores across the sector for each NSS Question Category, divided into quartiles. The circle indicates the College's position within the quartiles. Given the College's strategic aim to be "rated in the top quartile of key national student experience surveys", a continued focus on Assessment and Feedback is required to address low scores.

Chart 2: 2017 College Quartile Performance, by NSS Question Category
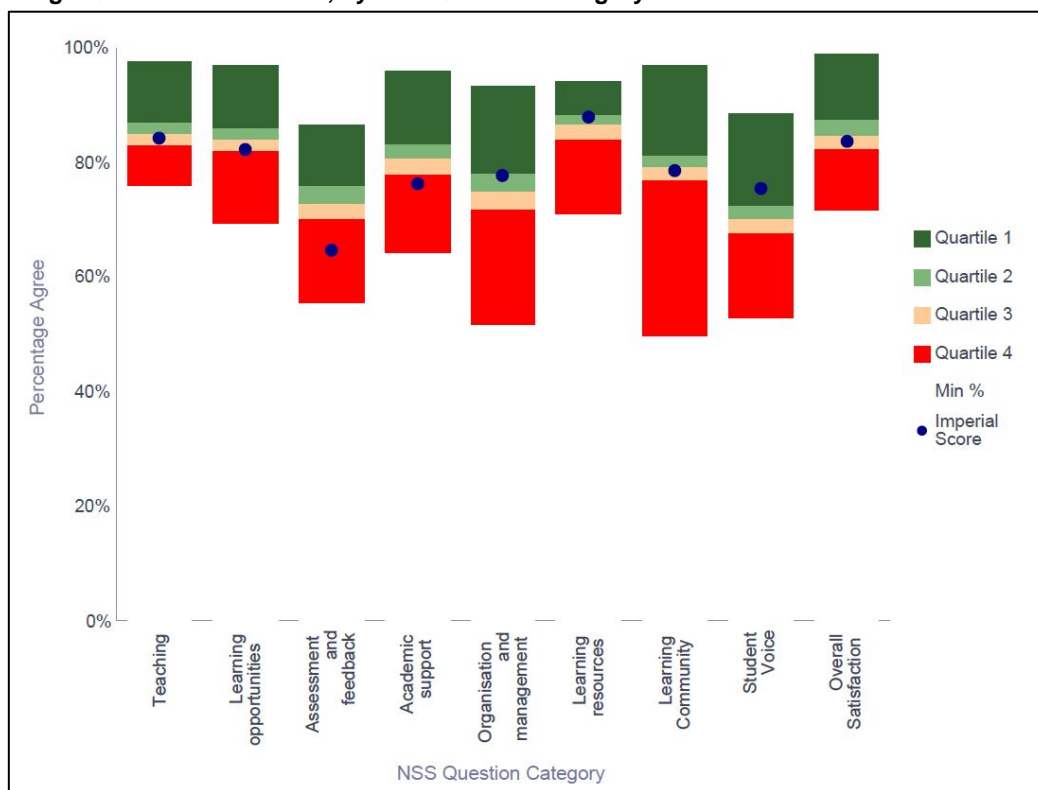
Free Text Comments

x.   In addition to the main questions within the NSS, respondents were provided with the opportunity to comment on two free-text questions, asking them about the "positive" and "negative" aspects of their student experience. Of the College's 1,530 respondents to the survey, 772 respondents chose to comment on at least one of these questions (50% comment rate) and in total 1,335 comments were provided in response to both questions. Each comment often contained multiple statements covering a range of topics. In total there were 1,085 positive statements and 1,209 negative statements in 2017. Table 2 below provides examples of some of the positive and negative messages identified from these statements.

Table 2: Examples of Positive and Negative Messages from the Free-Text Comments Section of the NSS 2017

Positive Messages	Negative Messages
Teaching: Lecturers are experts in their fields and are passionate, helpful and intellectually stimulating.	**Teaching:** Poor quality and delivery of lectures in places, such as poor communication and providing unclear and insufficient explanations.
Academic Support: Set office hours are helpful for getting help from tutors and lecturers. Staff are supportive, offering help and guidance.	**Assessment & Feedback:** Long waiting times for receiving feedback. No feedback on exam performance or access to marked scripts to understand mistakes and improve performance. Variation in marking of lab-based work.
Learning Opportunities: Courses are intellectually stimulating. There is an excellent and a wide range of choices with varied content of modules. Courses incorporate cutting edge research.	**Workload:** Poor distribution of lectures, coursework deadlines, and exams. Highly stressful environment leading to mental health issues, of which support is not always available or difficult to find. No time for social or extra-curricular activities.
Learning Community: Many opportunities to engage in high quality group work with peers. There is a sense of community between both academics and students.	**Learning Opportunities:** Certain module options and courses unavailable. Lack of opportunities to develop certain skills which would help in later careers.

xi.   Charts 3 and 4 provide a breakdown of the positive and negative statements. Respondents' statements have been grouped into appropriately themed categories with the smallest grouped into "Other". The top three categories of positive statements for the College in 2017 were in regards to Learning Opportunities (23.7% of positive statements), Teaching (22.2% of positive statements) and Learning Community (9.0% of positive statements). The top three negative statements were in regards to Assessment and Feedback (15.6% of negative statements), Workload (13.2% of negative statements) and Teaching (13.0% of negative statements). It should be noted that negative statements do not always directly correlate with dissatisfaction. For example, respondents highlighting one negative aspect of their teaching experience may have concurrently provided a positive comment on different aspects of their teaching experience and answered that they were satisfied with their teaching.
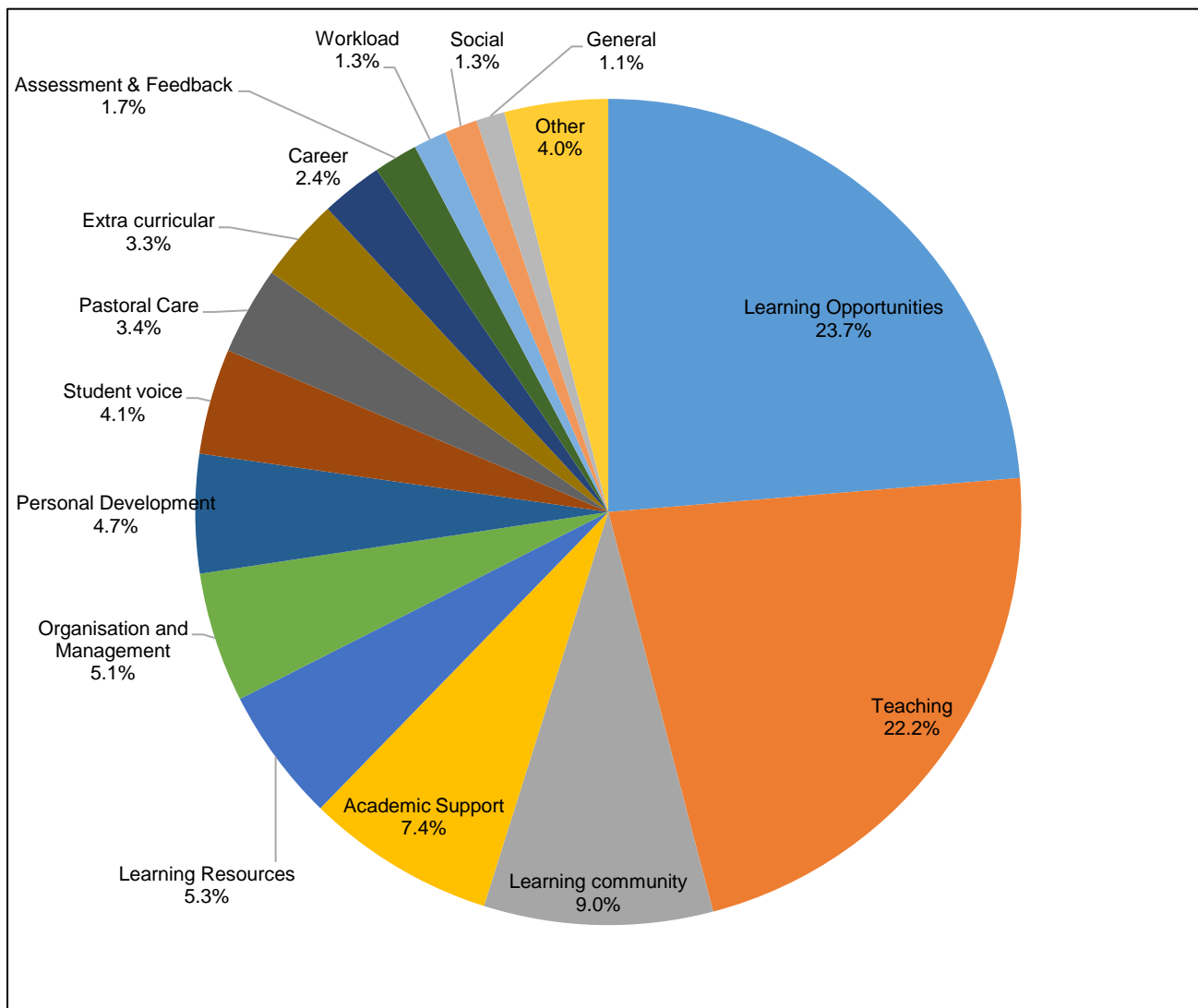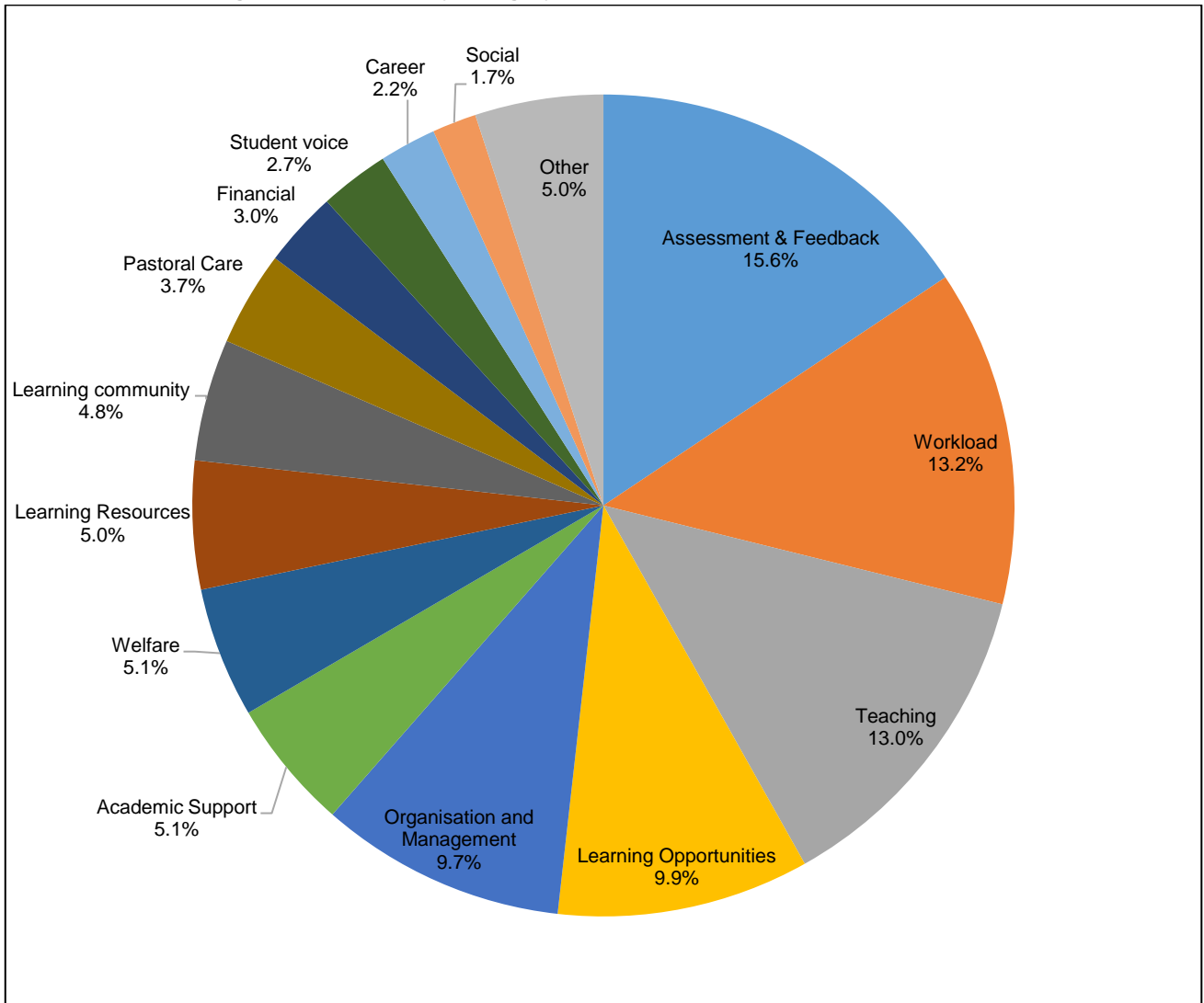
Chart 3: Breakdown of Positive Statements by Category

National Students Survey 2017

Chart 4: Breakdown of Negative Statements by Category

Departmental Results

xii. Table 3 below shows NSS 2017 percentage satisfaction by NSS Question Category for each department, colour coded to provide a comparison to the Sector Average and last year's results. Three departments have a higher percentage satisfaction in all NSS Question Categories than the Sector Average: Civil & Environmental Engineering; Earth Science & Engineering; and Mechanical Engineering. Chemistry and Physics have a lower percentage satisfaction in all NSS Question Categories than the Sector Average.

Table 3: NSS 2017 Department Percentage Satisfaction by NSS Question Category

Percentage Satisfaction by Department	Teaching	Learning Opportunities	Assessment & feedback	Academic support	Organisation & management	Learning resources	Learning Community	Student Voice	Overall Satisfaction	Overall Satisfaction Δ since 2016
Aeronautics	74%	74%	58%	73%	72%	88%	76%	64%	78%	+4%
Bioengineering	92%	91%	68%	80%	84%	84%	89%	82%	97%	+16%
Chemical Engineering	87%	87%	69%	81%	87%	83%	83%	82%	84%	-5%
Civil & Environmental Engineering	89%	89%	75%	89%	90%	95%	91%	85%	94%	-2%
Computing	84%	88%	63%	78%	78%	92%	85%	82%	86%	-3%
Earth Science & Engineering	96%	95%	93%	98%	96%	99%	91%	95%	97%	n/a
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	87%	88%	68%	75%	82%	91%	84%	81%	86%	-2%
Materials	80%	85%	64%	75%	75%	94%	81%	74%	87%	+11%
Mechanical Engineering	89%	90%	80%	89%	87%	88%	86%	83%	86%	+3%
Medicine	85%	83%	65%	77%	76%	91%	84%	80%	90%	+3%
Biomedical Sciences	84%	75%	53%	66%	49%	80%	76%	73%	70%	-6%
Life Sciences - Biology	85%	78%	64%	73%	78%	86%	71%	66%	81%	0%
Life Sciences - Biochemistry	83%	83%	63%	67%	80%	83%	70%	72%	83%	+6%
Chemistry	81%	79%	55%	63%	64%	86%	68%	61%	73%	-14%
Mathematics	81%	73%	59%	75%	77%	88%	65%	71%	78%	-8%
Physics	78%	66%	48%	67%	66%	82%	61%	57%	67%	0%

Key

Green fill: Higher percentage satisfaction in 2017 than 2016	Red fill: Lower percentage satisfaction in 2017 than 2016
Blue text: College outcome greater than Sector Average	**Red text: College outcomes less than Sector Average**

xiii. All Departments within the Faculties of Medicine and Natural Sciences have a lower percentage satisfaction in Learning Community than the sector average while departments within the Faculty of Engineering are equal to or higher than the sector average. Within the Faculty of Engineering all Departments except for Materials are above the sector average for Overall Satisfaction, while within the Faculty of Natural Sciences all Departments are below average. Within the Faculty of Medicine, Medicine is above the sector average while Biomedical Sciences is below the sector average.

xiv. Table 4 overleaf shows the NSS 2017 rank in the sector by department and NSS Question Category. Ranks are highlighted to show quartile performance. Four Departments rank in the top quartile in their NSS Subject for Overall Satisfaction: Bioengineering; Civil & Environmental Engineering; Earth Science & Engineering; and Mechanical Engineering. Civil & Environmental Engineering; Earth Science & Engineering; and Mechanical Engineering ranks within the top two quartiles for all Question Categories. Biomedical Sciences and all departments within the Faculty of Natural Sciences rank in the bottom quartile for Overall Satisfaction. Physics ranks in the bottom quartile for all Question Categories.

Table 4: NSS 2017 Department Rank in Sector and Quartile Performance

Rank in Sector by Department	Teaching	Learning Opportunities	Assessment & Feedback	Academic Support	Organisation & Management	Learning Resources	Learning Community	Student Voice	Overall Satisfaction	Number of HEIs
Aeronautics	23	19	20	18	15	10	18	12	19	28
Bioengineering	4	6	18	10	2	17	5	2	2	25
Chemical Engineering	9	11	12	11	5	21	14	5	14	27
Civil & Environmental Engineering	19	12	16	6	4	8	5	4	11	53
Computing	29	15	87	57	36	15	18	8	29	103
Earth Science & Engineering	3	2	1	1	1	1	9	1	5	25
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	26	12	50	57	17	24	29	12	38	71
Materials	15	10	14	13	9	2	8	9	9	15
Mechanical Engineering	11	6	6	7	4	28	13	3	18	72
Medicine	27	27	19	21	12	16	23	5	19	30
Biomedical Sciences	49	64	63	63	64	58	54	33	60	67
Life Sciences - Biology	57	68	53	65	50	58	66	62	63	75
Life Sciences - Biochemistry	39	30	38	45	24	40	43	27	39	47
Chemistry	45	41	48	49	45	35	48	42	48	50
Mathematics	57	54	64	60	54	27	61	42	61	66
Physics	38	42	42	41	39	35	40	37	41	42

Key

| Top Quartile	Second Quartile	Third Quartile	Bottom Quartile

xv.   Table 5 below provides a summary of the top positive and negative statement categories for each Department from the free-text comments section on the survey.

xvi.   Assessment and Feedback was the most common negative statement for all departments within the Faculty of Natural Sciences. Workload was the most common negative statement for six of the nine departments within the Faculty of Engineering.

Table 5: Summary of Top Positive and Negative Statement Categories by Department for NSS 2017

Department	Top Positive Statement Category(s)	Top Negative Statement Category(s)
Aeronautics	Teaching	Assessment & Feedback / Workload
Bioengineering	Teaching	Assessment & Feedback / Teaching
Chemical Engineering	Teaching	Workload
Civil & Environmental Engineering	Learning Opportunities	Workload
Computing	Learning Opportunities	Workload
Earth Science & Engineering	Learning Opportunities	Learning Opportunities
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	Learning Opportunities	Workload
Materials	Learning Opportunities	Teaching
Mechanical Engineering	Learning Opportunities	Workload
Medicine	Teaching	Teaching
Biomedical Sciences	Teaching	Organisation & Management
Life Sciences - Biology	Teaching	Assessment and Feedback
Life Sciences - Biochemistry	Learning Opportunities	Assessment and Feedback / Teaching / Learning Opportunities
Chemistry	Learning Opportunities	Assessment & Feedback
Mathematics	Teaching	Assessment & Feedback
Physics	Learning Opportunities	Assessment and Feedback

NSS Response
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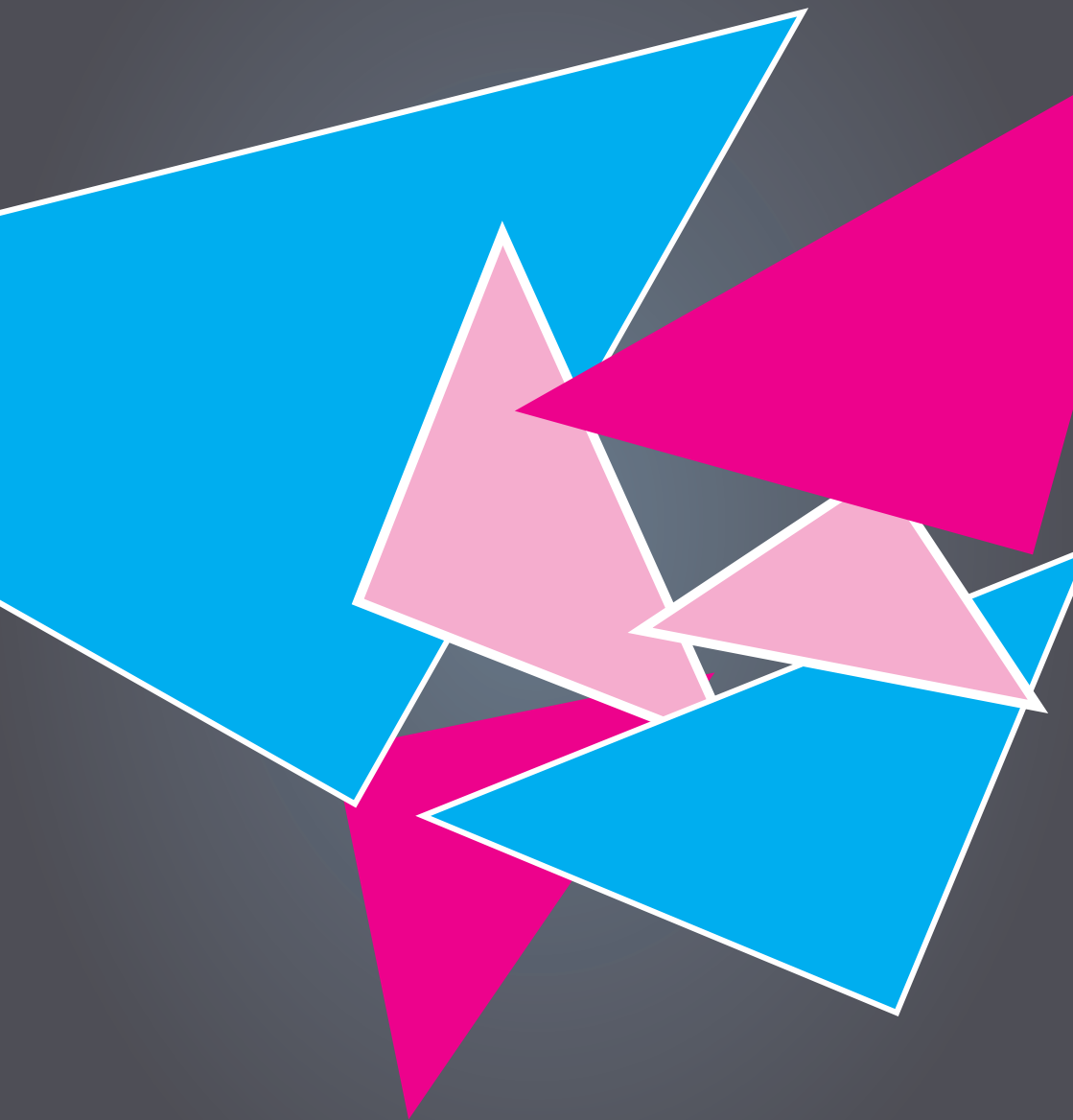
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imperialcollege**union**.org**/responses**

Introduction

This year marks Imperial College Union's seventh National Student Survey (NSS) Response, as part of our ongoing dialogue with College to improve the educational experience of our members here at Imperial.

The NSS is an annual survey completed by final year Undergraduates, designed to assess students' opinions of the quality of their degree programmes. The results offer a valuable insight into the student experience, helping to identify areas of strength and weakness. This year saw the addition of three new sections: "Learning Opportunities", "Learning Community", and "Student Voice". Our annual response aims to facilitate long-lasting, positive changes to our members' educational experience.

This year has seen the launch of two strategies: Imperial College Union's *Our Strategy 2017-20* and College's *Learning & Teaching Strategy*. We have chosen to focus the theme of our response around one of the key values outlined in our strategy: partnership. Given the significant areas of overlap between our recommendations and the areas identified as needing improvement in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, a constructive partnership with College is now more important than ever.

Many of our recommendations aim to complement those outlined in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, with particular emphasis

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on the areas for improvement that should be prioritised over the next year. With students feeling disengaged from their learning experience, it is imperative that they are consulted meaningfully and work with College to deliver the *Learning & Teaching Strategy.*

Working in partnership with students during the curriculum review process will help to address concerns around over-assessment and an over-inclusive curriculum. Striving for educational innovation will not only provide students with the deep and contextual understanding they desire, but will also allow them to develop a transferable skillset that will increase their employability.

By collaborating with the Union's *Academic Representation Network*, College will be able to address the issues surrounding the quality

of teaching and feedback, as part of a shared community that aspires to the same goal: educational excellence.

It is this desire to achieve educational excellence that led College to develop its *Learning & Teaching Strategy*. With a clear direction, now is the time to make long-lasting, positive change. Our members are uniquely placed to drive this change, and we look forward to continuing to work in partnership with College to improve the educational experience of all students here at Imperial.

I am grateful to Nayab Cheema, Fran Hyatt and Alex Chippy Compton for their help in writing this response. I would also like to thank our Academic Representatives, who have helped to frame many of our recommendations. Finally, I would like to thank those who responded to the NSS. Their feedback plays a vital role in driving change, ultimately helping to shape the educational experience of current and future students for the better. I wish them well in their future endeavours.

The Union looks forward to working in partnership with College to implement these recommendations, ensuring that Imperial is renowned for its educational experience and innovation across all disciplines.

Teaching

84%
2017

85%
2016

89%
2015
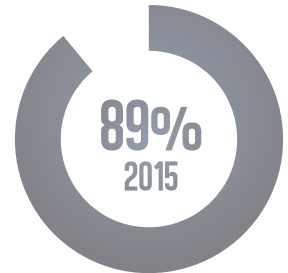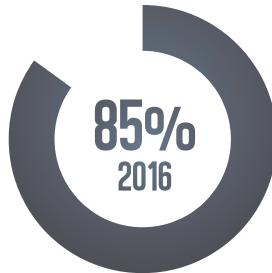
85%
Sector
Average

85%
Russell Group
Average

Imperial College London received a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) this year. However, overall satisfaction with teaching has fallen from 2016 and student satisfaction in this area remains below both sector and Russell Group averages.

For many students, excellent teaching stems from interacting with lecturers who are at the top of their field, bringing world-leading knowledge and enthusiasm to their teaching. However, excellent teaching should also inspire curiosity, critical thinking and creativity. College has highlighted this in its *Learning & Teaching Strategy* with the hope of ensuring that Imperial graduates are independent learners with deep, conceptual understanding of their disciplines. The recommendations in this section aim to complement those of the *Learning & Teaching Strategy* to ensure that Imperial continues to strive towards providing a world-class education to its students.

Imperial is a world-leading research institution, known for being at the forefront of scientific innovation. However, with many courses still using traditional didactic teaching methods, the world-leading innovation seen in research is yet to be mirrored across teaching.

Lecturers who have embraced new forms of pedagogy – utilising tools such as Mentimeter or Panopto – are well received among students, whilst those who resist change and lecture by "reading off slides" fare less well. More interactive forms of learning, like group work and tutorials, are preferred to traditional, didactic lectures. This allows students to apply their knowledge and develop soft skills, providing them with a broader skillset for the future.

Tutorials were possibly my most positive learning experience at Imperial. Most of the tutors seemed to want to be there, to teach us new concepts and ideas. This was the way through which I felt I learnt the most.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

In 2016, after continued dialogue with College on the importance of investing in innovative teaching, the Union was pleased to see the creation of the *Excellence Fund for Learning and Teaching Innovation*. This £1 million per year fund aims to reward innovation in teaching by supporting novel pedagogical methods that will benefit the wider learning community. This year has seen funding allocated to projects focusing on the use of technology enhanced learning and innovation in teaching delivery, assessment and feedback.

We are glad to see College actively taking steps to support those who show commitment to teaching innovation. With the *Learning & Teaching Strategy* recognising the need for interactive pedagogy, now is the time to encourage the development of new teaching methods with collaboration between students and staff.

Recommendation

College should pursue educational innovation with the same drive it does research, recognising and celebrating innovative teaching. Through supporting and championing staff and student led initiatives, College can shape and share best teaching practice.

I've had to learn most courses through lecture notes due to poor teaching. I've attended all the lectures, but honestly, my time would be more efficiently spent reading and understanding the lecture notes myself.

PHYSICS STUDENT

There are examples of excellent teaching scattered across College. However, such excellence is not uniform, with inconsistencies in teaching quality between faculties, departments, and even within disciplines.

Good teaching does more than relay facts; it instils deep, conceptual understanding and inspires students. Despite teaching quality being a major contributor to learning, students continue to report disinterested and uninspiring lecturers. There is desire among students for widespread excellence in teaching.

More needs to be done to address discrepancies in teaching quality. This will ensure that all students receive a high quality learning experience. *The Academic Representation Network* supports Representatives in every department to provide feedback and share best practice. These students are uniquely placed to work alongside their department to identify and address inconsistencies.

Recommendation

Ensure that inconsistencies in teaching within departments are addressed by working with Academic Representatives to identify, acknowledge and adopt successful approaches to teaching that have impacted students positively.

Having a good lecturer really makes a big impact on my interest and, therefore, has a better impact on my results too.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

Most of the lecturers seemed disinterested and wanted to get out of the theatre as soon as possible. Often times the 'lecturing' consisted of the professor standing in front of a PowerPoint filled with words and reciting those words back to us in an objectively monotone voice.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Learning Opportunities

82%
2017

84%
Sector Average

82%
Russell Group Average

The Learning Opportunities section is a new addition to the 2017 NSS. This section aims to assess students' depth of knowledge, and whether they are given the chance to bring information and ideas together across different topics.

In this new section, Imperial's score matched the Russell Group average, but was below the sector average. Students expressed concerns that large amounts of course material prevents them from engaging with their learning in a deep and meaningful way, often to the detriment of their personal development. The *Learning & Teaching Strategy* recognises the need for deeper, more conceptual learning through curriculum review and changes to our adopted pedagogy.

Through implementing the recommendations set out in this section, alongside those in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, we are confident that Imperial will be able to provide an engaging, holistic curriculum that supports its students in both personal and professional development.

Students come to Imperial passionate about their chosen discipline. However, there is a risk that students may lose this passion through an overly burdensome curriculum and examinations that often test factual regurgitation rather than a deeper, conceptual understanding.

Poor work-life balance is a major concern for students, with many forced to reduce or even give up extra-curricular activities in order to keep up with academic demands. There are also concerns of the impact this has on wellbeing, with many students left exhausted and disheartened.

The *Learning & Teaching Strategy* has identified curriculum review as a priority for departments to undertake. In this response we ask that students be involved in the curriculum review process, as they are uniquely placed to assess the impacts curriculum has on work-life balance. We hope that departments recognise the value of students as key stakeholders and meaningful participants in this process and support their involvement in all stages of the process.

Recommendation

Departments should recognise students as key stakeholders and work to support them to effectively and meaningfully participate in the process of reviewing and developing their curriculum.

> The course was exceptionally mentally challenging and stimulating. The quality of the teaching was world-class; I feel privileged to have been able to interact with the leader's scientific research.

MATHEMATICS STUDENT

> Courses are jammed full of information which is thrown at students hoping as much as possible will stick. I feel like I'm learning how to pass an exam as opposed to expanding my knowledge.

ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING STUDENT

For many students, the chance to enter University to study a subject of their choosing brings about a welcome autonomy that contrasts to the prescriptive education often experienced at school. This autonomy is one of the hallmarks of higher education, and is a key motivator for students choosing to continue their education beyond school.

Students value the opportunity to study topics of their own interests in more depth. Indeed, choice of modules in later years consistently comes out as something students enjoy most during their time at Imperial.

However, there is frustration that opportunities to direct learning is often limited to later years of study. This leads to students feeling dissatisfied with the lack of control over their own learning. We recognise that it is necessary to equip students with knowledge of key principles early on, which may limit the choice of modules at this stage. Nevertheless, we believe that the upcoming curriculum review, recommended in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, provides the perfect opportunity to explore this further.

Recommendation

Utilise the curriculum review to evaluate the feasibility of offering modular choices earlier in degrees, thereby allowing students more autonomy over their studies.

The degree offers a lot of choice for various courses starting much earlier than in many other degrees. This allows students to focus on areas. They are most interested in and allow early contact with cutting edge research.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

I also personally do not understand why electives are only available for the final two years. Part of the difference between high school and university is that students should be able to make their own choices and take responsibility for them, but I feel that I had no control over my university learning at all.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Assessment & Feedback

65%
2017

62%
2016

68%
2015
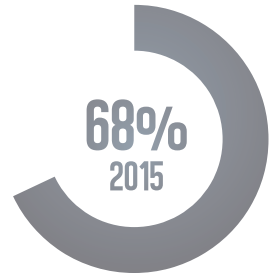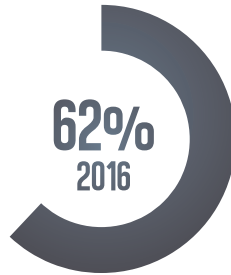
73%
Sector
Average

70%
Russell Group
Average

Feedback is vital to the learning process, enabling students to reflect on their work, and providing guidance for improvement and development. Imperial has improved in this area since last year, but is still behind both sector and Russell Group averages.

College is making efforts to address the issues of feedback through the development of the Feedback Traffic Light Process, which has already been successfully adopted in many departments. These efforts are reflected in the increased scores from last year, which is encouraging to see. However, with scores below both sector and Russell Group averages, there is still room for improvement.

It is imperative that the Feedback Traffic Light Process is implemented across College, not just a few departments. In addition, there must be consistent adherence to policy, as introduction of policy alone will not address student dissatisfaction. This will result in a more consistent experience for all students at Imperial.

Imperial has made efforts to address the issue of coursework feedback, working in partnership with the Union to develop policy dictating the timely return of assessment feedback. Despite this, many students continue to see feedback returned beyond stipulated limits.

Delayed feedback prevents students from reflecting on their work and applying this understanding to subsequent assessment. Students have also highlighted a double-standard in penalties for missing deadlines when they are still receiving their work late, acting as a source of significant frustration.

Given these factors it is vital that departments adhere to feedback policy. Assessment feedback should be continually reviewed at departmental or faculty level to monitor performance and ensure adherence to policy. Students should be involved in this process, with feedback performance added as standing item to Student-Staff Committee agendas.

Recommendation

College should continually review the timeliness of feedback at either departmental or faculty level, and add feedback performance as a standing item on SSC agendas to ensure that late return of coursework is noted and acted upon.

Feedback has always been timely with detailed individual comments, which have helped to further my understanding.
EARTH SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING STUDENT

Coursework feedback usually comes after the final coursework, which is quite pointless since we cannot improve from gaining the feedback.
MATHEMATICS STUDENT

Examinations are often a source of stress for students. This is particularly apparent for students at Imperial, who express frustration at uncertainty around examination guidance as a result of unclear instructions and expectations.

A lack of past papers and marking schemes is felt to hinder examination preparation and therefore cause undue stress. We support the recommendations outlined in the Learning & Teaching Strategy, which call to make past exam papers and mark schemes available for all coursework and exams.

Exam feedback is often minimal with students uncertain of how to improve their performance. There is also a risk that students scoring highly may miss important gaps in knowledge. Providing model solutions for all coursework and examinations, as outlined in the *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, will help to mitigate these issues.

Recommendation

Examination instructions should be reviewed and (where possible) standardised across departments. Alongside this, past exam papers and mark schemes should be made available for all coursework and exams, with model solutions available in addition to this.

◢◢
Some of the criteria of exam marking are provided in advance and some of the past paper is provided, which are helpful.
CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

◢◢
The lack of transparency and feedback on marking of their [students'] examinations is frustrating and detrimental to the learning process. Students do not know what they have done right or wrong and accordingly, frustration creeps in due to lack of performance and self-knowledge awareness.
CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Academic Support

77%
2017

77%
2016

83%
2015
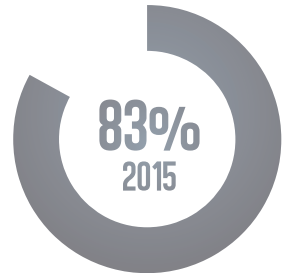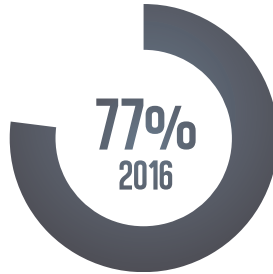
80%
Sector
Average

79%
Russell Group
Average

Imperial College London is a world-leading university with a reputation for excellence, attracting some of the brightest students from all over the world. However, this culture of striving for perfection manifests itself as an intense learning environment, which in many instances has been to the detriment of students' wellbeing.

Studying at a top university should not mean studying in an unduly high pressured environment. The Union has consistently maintained that students reaching their breaking point is not the hallmark of a prestigious university. With scores below both sector and Russell Group averages, further work is needed to reduce the amount of pressure that Imperial students face.

We recognise that College's commitment to improve mental health provision in its recent strategy is the first step in making long-lasting change to welfare support. We welcome the emphasis this places on student support provision at Imperial.

In recognition of the pressure our members are facing, the Union has created a new *Wellbeing Representation Network*. This network mirrors our successful *Academic Representation Network*, and aims to identify, communicate and tackle the social and emotional challenges of being a student at Imperial. We hope the *Wellbeing Representation Network* will provide a deeper understanding of the specific welfare issues faced by our members and we look forward to collaborating with College in this endeavour.

Personal tutors play a vital role in student wellbeing and support provisions within College, providing pastoral and, in many cases, academic support. They act as the primary point of contact for many students, easing the transition to university, and making the university experience more personal.

Over the past few years, College has taken steps to ensure that the personal tutor system is continually developing and improving. This has resulted in role-specific training, online resources from the Educational Development Unit, and the Personal Tutor Working Group.

As College continues to develop the personal tutor system, we ask that all students are given structured, timetabled sessions with their personal tutor. These sessions should be monitored to ensure that students are being supported throughout their time here at Imperial.

Recommendation

All students should have regular meetings with their personal tutors throughout their degree. Departments should ensure that there is timetabled space for these meetings, and provide personal tutors with an optional structure to guide the sessions. Engagement must be monitored to ensure consistency in the support provision.

Personal tutors and supervisors really take the welfare of their students seriously and provide help with anxiety and stress.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STUDENT

I had little help or contact with my personal tutor which would have been useful when making important decisions about the course.

COMPUTING STUDENT

We welcome the commitment made by College in its *Strategy 2015-2020*, which pledged to prioritise the mental wellbeing of students at Imperial, a vital step towards improving mental health support for our members.

Two years on, there is still a great deal of work to do to ensure that students with mental health problems are given appropriate guidance and support. This starts with tackling the stigma that still surrounds mental health problems, preventing many students from seeking support.

This stigma means that individuals often feel ashamed of discussing their struggles, leading many to suffer in silence. In order to improve mental health provision at Imperial, there needs to a significant culture change. College should aim to create an environment where both staff and students are able to talk openly about their mental health problems, however big or small.

Access to mental health first aid training for all student-facing staff, and mandatory attendance for personal and senior tutors, will go a long way to ensuring that there is a wider awareness among College staff of the mental health problems faced by Imperial students.

Recommendation

Provide appropriate mental health first aid training for student-facing staff (with mandatory attendance for personal and senior tutors) to ensure a greater understanding of the problems facing students.

Staff are friendly and ready to help on one-to-one basis. Tutors know the port of call for handling issues and are, in general, really approachable.
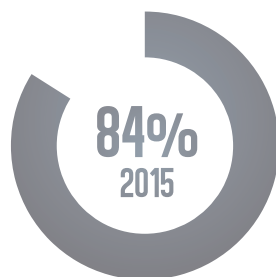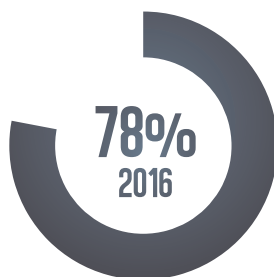
PHYSICS STUDENT

A real lack of support for students academically and no concern for the mental health and welfare of the students, or awareness of the impact the course has on student welfare.

CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Organisation & Management

78%
2017

78%
2016

84%
2015

75%
Sector
Average

78%
Russell Group
Average

A well-organised degree programme enables its students to flourish. A student given their timetable, assessment deadlines and examination information ahead of time is able to plan their schedule effectively. This is particularly important with many students undertaking part-time jobs and extracurricular activities alongside their studies, as well as commuting between campuses for teaching.

College has recognised this issue, and is currently working with Operational Excellence to address both academic and examination timetabling issues. The Union is committed to working in partnership with College on this matter.

Imperial's score matched last year's, and was higher than both sector and Russell Group averages. However, with results down from 2015, it is important that we continue to work together to tackle this issue.

With our members feeling burdened by trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance, time is a valuable resource. In order for students to balance academics, extra-curricular activities and part-time employment, it is important that they receive both academic and examination timetables in advance.

Unfortunately, many students report that they had not received their exam timetables until a few weeks before their exams, making it difficult to plan their revision timetables. Releasing examination timetables at least a term in advance will enable students to plan their revision schedules ahead of time.

Recommendation

Departments should ensure that exam timetables are released at the start of the preceding term so that students can plan their schedules accordingly.

The exam timetable is generally released late February, which means that we cannot plan our revision, break, and personal life in advance.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Well organised, the course has pushed me to find my potentials and apply my knowledge.

CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Imperial is proud to be home to the leaders of tomorrow. Our graduates are employed by world-leading institutions in a variety of sectors. The career application process can be daunting, particularly for graduate schemes with lengthy processes. With multiple deadlines and exams falling within the same time as internship and graduate scheme application deadlines, students are finding themselves having to decide between their degree and their future employment.

If Imperial graduates are to continue to reach their full potential, students need to be given the time to devote themselves to their professional development without worrying about upcoming assignments.

Recommendation

Ensure that students are given adequate space in the timetable to focus on professional development and future employment.

Best university and department to advance into a career in engineering. I found jobs easy to get, to the point where I had to reject top Formula one teams because I had better offers.
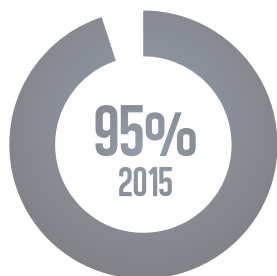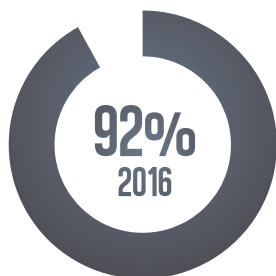
AERONAUTICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

The department constantly prides itself on how good the employability of its graduates is, but does not create enough time for 4th year students to adequately find time to apply for jobs in an ever-growing, competitive job market

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Learning Resources

88%
2017

92%
2016

95%
2015

85%
Sector
Average

87%
Russell Group
Average

This is an area where Imperial has traditionally excelled. While Imperial has scored higher than both the sector and Russell Group averages, satisfaction has fallen from last year.

Learning Resources covers a wide range of facilities and equipment which are central to learning and teaching, including equipment, space and library facilities. With work on the Central Library underway, the Union is happy to see the installation of a long-awaited cooling and ventilation system. This is a positive response to student feedback over the temperature and lack of ventilation. Alongside this, the newly renovated library will also include improved power provision to the upper levels.

We are glad to see College making changes on the basis of student feedback, which will positively impact the learning experience of students at Imperial.

Technology continues to develop and evolve at a rapid pace. Alongside this, the rate at which new subject-specific learning applications are being released is increasing. With a move towards more digitally enhanced learning and teaching, it is imperative that students have access to the latest software and applications to facilitate their learning.

Although students have access to a multitude of software through the Jukebox application, they are not always aware of this opportunity. Given the shift in our adopted pedagogy, it is vital that students are adequately signposted to the relevant software. Furthermore, providing students with a comprehensive knowledge base through appropriate training will enable them to maximally utilise the software provided.

Recommendation

Departments should review software used by its students and ensure appropriate training is provided and clearly signposted.

Every so often when I want to take out a specific book, I can always depend on the library. The (Central) Library usually has the book, but it is also very easy to request them to purchase a copy which they do in a timely manner.

MATHEMATICS STUDENT

We need proper lessons for useful computer software like MATLAB and ASPEN. (...) [the department] should get us familiarised with the software first.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

With our libraries and teaching spaces reaching capacity, space is now at a premium. To this end, the Space Sharing Policy and accompanying framework sets out College's commitment to effectively utilising and managing shared space across Imperial for the benefit of all students.

Despite the demand for study areas, many teaching spaces within departments are currently underutilised. There is scope for these department-specific spaces to be opened out to all students as quiet study spaces during busy periods. This will give all students the opportunity to work, no matter the time of day, enabling them to maximise their learning potential.

Recommendation

When not in use, make teaching spaces accessible to all students, regardless of discipline, better utilising existing departmental spaces.

The learning resources at Imperial are fantastic; there is an incredibly large range of books and journals that can be accessed both in the library and online.
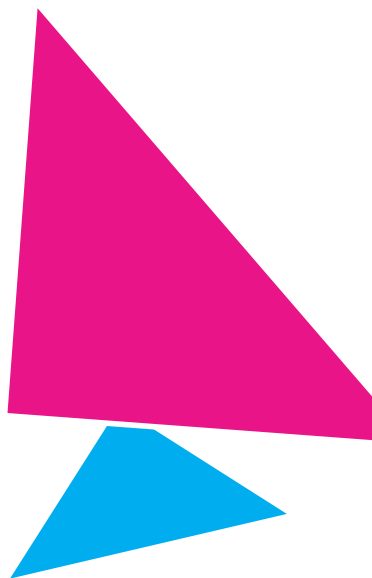
CHEMISTRY STUDENT

Library not large enough to accommodate the number of students wanting to use the facilities. Often not enough seats, most of which don't have charging ports. Not appropriate when each student tends to have a laptop or phone.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

Learning Community

79%
2017

77%
Sector
Average

76%
Russell Group
Average

Another new addition to this year's NSS, the Learning Community section asks students to consider whether they felt part of a community of staff and students during their time at Imperial.

It is promising to see that Imperial has exceeded both the sector and Russell Group averages in this area. As part of the new *Learning & Teaching Strategy*, College are dedicated to creating a vibrant educational community among staff and students that recognises and celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

Though it can be difficult to build a community across different teaching sites, the Union welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership with College to foster a diverse community between staff and students.

Studying at university can be isolating, particularly when the university is located in a city as big as London. Although there is a sense of community among staff and students in some areas of College, more work needs to be done to develop this in all departments.

The recent *Institutional Culture Report* highlighted areas within the Imperial community where staff and students feel reluctant to come forward and report examples of bullying and discrimination occurring on campus. Alongside this, participants also reported a lack of community spirit and an impersonal culture.

The report highlighted areas for improvement within the Imperial community. We urge College to address these issues, to positively impact the culture at Imperial.

Recommendation

Work with Imperial College Union and students across College to develop and publish an action plan and timeline, based on the recommendations in the Institutional Culture Report.

The four years' study at Imperial is the most valuable experience I have ever gained. Imperial is not aiming to educate great employee, but also good in shaping future leaders. It allows a great diversity, and also has very strict requirements towards its students. It is not training for technical and professional skills, but also shaping us into a better adult, ready to enter in the working environment.
CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

London as a city is not overly student friendly in terms of sense of community. The university as a whole does not act sufficiently to foster a sense of community.
LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

Extracurricular activities play a critical role in the personal development of students beyond their studies. Alongside this, Departmental Societies and Constituent Unions develop and nurture a positive community across departments and faculties.

The role of Departmental Societies is to provide students with an outlet to pursue their interests beyond the lecture theatre, as well as serving as a way for students to socialise with each other. Departmental Societies run events such as networking opportunities, CV workshops, festive meals and external activities.

Departmental Societies are an invaluable resource who bring staff and students together in a more relaxed environment. By working together, Departments and their Societies will be able to foster an inclusive and welcoming community for both staff and students alike.

Recommendation

Departments should work closely with Departmental Representatives and Societies, supporting them to run events aimed at bringing students together and nurturing a community of staff and students.

◢◢
One of the things I like about Imperial is the opportunity to meet eminent researchers and form part of a strong academic community.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

◢◢
The sense of community is rather poor. Colleagues seem to be friendly only in certain small circles.

CHEMICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Student Voice

76%
2017

69%
Sector Average

68%
Russell Group Average

Student Voice is a new section in the 2017 NSS. This section aims to assess whether students have the opportunity to provide feedback on their course, and whether these views are valued and acted upon.

In this new section, Imperial scored higher than the sector average and achieved the highest score of all Russell Group universities. This encouraging result reflects the effort College has made to engage with student feedback.

However, there are always areas for improvement. These recommendations set out how Imperial can continue to lead the way in engaging with its students, working with students as key stakeholders to drive positive change.

Students are in a prime position to offer feedback on their educational experience. There are countless examples where feedback from students has inspired positive changes at College. Students and staff are encouraged to work together to improve education at Imperial.

This cannot happen when students feel their feedback is ignored. Despite its high score in this domain, there are still instances at College where students' feedback is not acted upon. By working with departments to close the feedback loop, College will ensure that students are aware of the changes that have (or have not) been made based on their feedback.

Recommendation

Departments should ensure they close the feedback loop, informing students of steps taken (or not) following their feedback.

Seeing changes being made immediately for the year below mine based on feedback provided by my year, and talking to younger years about their perception of the change is a real privilege.

BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES STUDENT

Certain lecturers are very stubborn when it comes to responding to student feedback, e.g., refusing to use Panopto or change way certain contents are taught using the same excuse every year. This gives very little incentive for students to complete the internal survey.

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING STUDENT

Student Staff Committees (SSCs) offer key opportunities for students to present feedback to senior departmental figures. While SOLE offers a retrospective snapshot analysis of problems, SSCs allow for dynamic, longer-term monitoring of departmental issues.

However, with student Representatives changing each year, and proposed changes often taking longer than this to be delivered, there is a risk that items discussed in SSCs are not followed to completion.

Successfully piloted in the Faculty of Medicine Early Years SSCs, the Traffic Light Action Tracker monitors the progress of agenda items. This ensures that items are followed to completion and provides a record of discussed items for future Representatives.

Recommendation

Departments should implement a Traffic Light Action Tracker within SSCs to monitor the progress of agenda items. Green: completion of item dealt with; amber: item being dealt with; red item not able to progress further. For items that cannot progress further, reasoning should be given.

It is clear that the department has taken all our feedback on individual modules into consideration and have acted upon it and made changes for the future years.

EARTH SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING STUDENT

Some negative feedback from students that was passed onto staff/the department was overlooked and excuses were made such as 'this problem happens every year' or 'this always goes wrong'; these excuses are not acceptable.

LIFE SCIENCES STUDENT

It is important that a Students' Union represents its members across all aspects of student life. Within the newly added Student Voice section, the 2017 NSS included a question aiming to assess whether students felt their union effectively represented their academic interests.

We are proud that the Union scored above the sector average. Furthermore, our members have ranked us among the highest in the Russell Group. We are always working to improve our provision and see our feedback improve year on year.

We will continue to support our volunteers in the Academic Representation Network across College. There is a large variation in scores between departments. We plan to review and evaluate our Network to identify and share good practice and extend the Network's reach.

With a Union-wide Governance & Democracy Review launching this year, we plan to review the structure of the *Academic Representation Network* and produce a set of recommendations to be implemented for the 2018/19 academic year.

Recommendation

Conduct a full-scale review of the structure and effectiveness of the Academic Representation Network in parallel with the Governance & Democracy Review ahead of the 2018/19 academic year.

◢◢
The Students' Union has been a key feature in actually enjoying my time at Imperial. The only place I ever felt truly a part of the Imperial community was as part of the clubs and societies offered from the Union.
CHEMISTRY STUDENT

◢◢
The Student Union lacked in transparency on how it was run and was too apprehensive about dealing with the college on matters such as the student social experience (accommodation.).
ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONIC ENGINEERING STUDENT

Vital Statistics

Department	Satisfaction 2017	Satisfaction 2016	Difference
Overall	84%	83%	+ 1%
Aeronautics	78%	74%	+ 4%
Bioengineering	97%	81%	+16%
Chemical Engineering	84%	89%	-5%
Chemistry	74%	86%	-12%
Civil & Environmental Engineering	94%	96%	-2%
Computing	87%	90%	-3%
Earth Science and Engineering	97%	N/A	N/A
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	84%	87%	-3%
Life Sciences	82%	80%	+2%
Materials	87%	76%	+ 11%
Mathematics	77%	84%	-7%
Mechanical Engineering	86%	83%	+3%
Physics	66%	67%	-1%
Biomedical Sciences	71%	76%	-5%
School of Medicine	90%	87%	+3%

Metric	2017 score	2016 score	Imperial College Union recommendations
Teaching	84%	85%	1) College should pursue educational innovation with the same drive it does research, recognising and celebrating innovative teaching. Through supporting and championing staff and student led initiatives, College can shape and share best teaching practice. 2) Ensure that inconsistencies in teaching within departments are addressed by working with Academic Reps to identify, acknowledge and adopt successful approaches to teaching that have impacted students positively.
Learning Opportunities	82%	-	3) Departments should recognise students as key stakeholders and work to support them to effectively and meaningfully participate in the process of reviewing and developing their curriculum. 4) Utilise the curriculum review to evaluate the feasibility of offering modular choices earlier in degrees, thereby allowing students more autonomy over their studies.
Assessment and Feedback	65%	62%	5) College should continually review the timeliness of feedback at either departmental or faculty level, and add feedback performance as a standing item on SSC agendas to ensure that late return of coursework is noted and acted upon. 6) Examination instructions should be reviewed and (where possible) standardised across departments. Alongside this, past exam papers and mark schemes should be made available for all coursework and exams, with model solutions available in addition to this.
Academic Support	77%	77%	7) All students should have regular meetings with their personal tutors throughout their degree. Departments should ensure that there is timetabled space for these meetings, and provide personal tutors with an optional structure to guide the sessions. Engagement must be monitored to ensure consistency in the support provision. 8) Provide appropriate mental health first aid training for student-facing staff (with mandatory attendance for personal and senior tutors) to ensure a greater understanding of the problems facing students.
Organisation and Management	78%	78%	9) Departments should ensure that exam timetables are released at the start of the preceding term so that students can plan their schedules accordingly. 10) Ensure that students are given adequate space in the timetable to focus on professional development and future employment.
Learning Resources	88%	92%	11) Departments should review software used by its students and ensure appropriate training is provided and clearly signposted. 12) When not in use, make teaching spaces accessible to all students, regardless of discipline, better utilising existing departmental spaces.

Learning Community	79%	-	13) Work with Imperial College Union and students across College to develop and publish an action plan and timeline, based on the recommendations in the Institutional Culture Report. 14) Departments should work closely with Departmental Representatives and Societies, supporting them to run events aimed at bringing students together and nurturing a community of staff and students.
Student Voice	76%	-	15) Departments should ensure they close the feedback loop, informing students of steps taken (or not) following their feedback. 16) Departments should implement a Traffic Light Action Tracker within SSCs to monitor the progress of agenda items. Green: completion of item dealt with; amber: item being dealt with; red item not able to progress further. For items that cannot progress further, reasoning should be given. 17) Conduct a full-scale review of the structure and effectiveness of the Academic Representation Network in parallel with the Governance & Democracy Review ahead of the 2018/19 academic year.