

Dear,
Provost

Our proposal on the use of Falmouth's Facilities

The elected Education Officer, elected Student Representatives, and I (Falmouth President) are writing on behalf of the students of AMATA, FSA, FTI, GA, IOP, SADI, SOE & SOFT, (SOC representatives were not present) whom we represent, are giving you this information to inform your decisions and empower you to make actions that address the significant challenges presently faced by our students. Universities have had to pay out the same as any other year, but our students have not received satisfactory or justifiable access to facilities like every other year. It is our responsibility to address this, so we have collated this feedback to support you and make the students' position and feelings as clear as possible.

We understand that the ever-changing guidance has made this academic year incredibly difficult. We have spent the year in and out of lockdowns, and Universities have had no choice but to conduct either a completely online or blended learning approach from March 2020, which is still ongoing as of the date of this letter in January 2021. Recently, arrangements have changed at short notice because of the current national lockdown and now many students are unable to return to campus until at least the end of February. Students now find themselves in a comparable situation to that of March 2020, where they are at home unable to access certain libraries, stores/ equipment, and study/ studio spaces that are necessary for many students to succeed and thrive academically.

As a group, we held an open meeting on Friday 15th January at Midday to discuss the following.

1. What would we like the University to do (within Government Guidelines) to support students academically this term?

Overall, the below were the major themes that ran across all schools regarding what the University could do better this term for them.

- The first core theme was "transparency and communication". Students feel that the university, throughout this period, has not been as transparent with its communication as students would have hoped. They have mentioned that some communication has come across patronising and that they would like more personal messaging. Students would like the university to give updates on decisions they are working on, even if they are not complete or set-in stone yet.
- The second topic was "timetables". Students are anxious, nervous, and unsure on what to do this term, as there is significant uncertainty surrounding what they can expect. They have asked for a 4-week timetable for now, and then a re-evaluation, just to put their minds at ease.
- Third in line was their "kit and equipment," with students saying, "we come to Falmouth for the kit". They understand the 72hr cleaning period, but do not understand the lack of investment into changing this if they cannot return to university. In many cases, their courses (and the associated costs) are both unjustifiable and unviable without it, so they are extremely concerned over their access to equipment.
- All students present unanimously felt they did not get a sufficient "quality of education" last term and have asked for more one-to-one sessions with their tutors and the ASK

service. They have also expressed a focus on ensuring student collaboration is a priority, as especially first year course communities are suffering. The disparity between the enthusiasm and interactivity of online learning at the beginning of term, to the latter period, which focused on relying on books, was noticeable. So, even if we are to return to blended learning, it is demanded that an improved form of blended learning is made a priority. Improved and increased access to facilities to key, alongside better online teaching; students need training and physical practice with equipment, spaces, ensembles, audiences, tech and so on. Many students feel underprepared for graduation or their next year as they have not made high quality portfolio pieces this year because of the factors mentioned.

- Finally, they were all in agreement that keeping the facilities “open over summer” for free use is the ‘least’ Falmouth can do to allow them to create, do better work and make up for lost time. This is even if their original deadlines are kept.

In addition to the above themes, we have gathered specific information regarding each School who attended the meeting.

- **AMATA** mentioned that Extenuating Circumstances are virtually impossible to get, they are denied and evidenced to an extreme, to the point that that students without access to working and reliable laptops cannot submit an online submission are still not granted one. They have also requested 3rd year priority for studio time.
- **FSA** would like to reinstate the safety net, with a clear explanation of what exactly that safety net does. Also, make so our grades can't go below the first years/ impossible to fail and make EC easier to access. Plus, look into easier access to tests for those based in Falmouth.
- **FTI** are concerned that teaching alternatives have not been offered to them aside from full-on making, however they cannot make industry standard clothing on limited resources at home. They would also like 3rd year priority for machine time.
- **GA** have commended how well teachers have adapted but are still concerned about their access to their technology and VR equipment specifically.
- **IOP** have stated that the university is responsible for a decent standard of online learning, and identified some modules, such as ‘history’ as less than sufficient. Instead of teaching, they have been told to read 16hrs of books a week. Nevertheless, it started off positive, but enthusiasm from teaching staff faded off. They also vocalised their lack of support from tutors, the University, and their services. They want to know if graduation will be affected by any of this, because they want to apply for a Masters.
- **SADI** have been disappointed with the communication of the university and course tutors, especially in 2nd year. They also requested that the VC office communicate place holders informing of ‘in the works’ rather than a lack of information. Students of SADI have expressed that campus needs COVID-19 enforcement as a priority, as people aren’t taking enough precautions seriously, especially with mask wearing.
- **SOE** have said that some students who have children are home-schooling and still unable to get extensions or any support from tutors. They raised a good point on the need for defining the student services better and bringing them all together in a digestible format to present to students.
- **SOFT** are anxious about leaving with only first year films under their belts and this has dampened morale amongst the students. They would also like 3rd year priority for stores/ equipment.

2. Would facilities being open longer help you gain the quality of work you want/need? If yes, would you want your assessment pushed back to match the extended time, or would you want the original deadline and just the use of the facilities for an extended time?

After speaking to the reps across different courses they all agreed that opening the facilities was a priority, they cannot agree their degree was justified without them.

The consensus is that students are missing out by studying online, as their courses require a lot of physical and practical training that does not remotely translate into an online format.

Students have expressed concerns about the impact of participating in online classes from their bedrooms, as they do not feel equipped to carry out this level of training, with the lack of space, lack of privacy and the fact that they do not have access to the promised safe spaces within which to build their skills and confidence.

However, regarding the approach to assessments, student representatives have brought forward the importance of reviewing this on a course-by-course basis to appropriately factor in the differences in courses.

Below, I have summarised on a course-by-course basis (of those who attended our open meeting) what their priorities and needs are. This is followed by an analysis of the general concerns and themes from across the schools in answer to the above question.

AMATA

- **Acting** representatives said that an extension of assessments would be difficult if it was only optional, due to their group projects heavily relying on everyone being present. So, it would have to be a mandatory assessment extension to ensure that it is a fair solution with equal access. They also said that if the facilities could stay open longer it would help them record pieces to send to agents, but also poses the difficulties that some students may go home (something they will have to deal with between them). AMATA had loads of safety measures in place, 2m squares marked out, reduced capacity, Perspex screens and so on, so, if that continues, and 2nd and 3rd years are prioritised for private bookings along with more COVID-19 tests that have been agreed it could work.
- **Theatre and Performance** representatives would like to make it known that it should be noted that they are halfway through their performing arts degree and have not had a single opportunity to perform live, or in a physical space, or to a public audience, let alone all three - which is a crucial aspect to their training. Therefore, the extension of access to use of the facilities should be based on the number weeks they have missed this term and last term whilst unable to use the facilities. They are eager to get back into these spaces as they need the studios and spaces for their training. Many students feel that they are not being sufficiently prepared for graduation because they are missing essential training, and therefore cannot build high quality portfolios/showreels. Doing this online has been challenging for their mental health. They do not want a repeat of last term where they had a 2-week turnaround on assessments.
- **Popular Music** agreed they wanted to keep the original deadlines, due to some internationals having to go home, however for those students who need it, they should be given deadline extensions.

- **Music** said that extending the term and reducing the tuition fees is a better path to take than trying to open facilities back up quickly, as not everyone can take advantage of that access due to living far away.
- **Creative Music Technology** said that most people on their course agreed that more time to access the facilities would be good and having the option of a different deadline would work best for them. They think having a two-tiered system would allow for the original deadline to remain for those who would want it, but a second extended deadline will help students who decide they need more time and breaks it up for tutors.
- **Music, Theatre and Entertainment Management** do not need any AMATA facilities. However, they mentioned that the University should keep their booking system to help reduce capacity in the buildings throughout extension.

FSA

- **Fine Art** have said it is crucial to have a deadline extension and that the use of extended facilities is also implemented. They argue that as artists, being stuck inside without resources is unfair and think that pushing assessment back would work for them.

FTI

- **Sportswear and Fashion Design** have expressed a need for the facilities to be opened sooner because an extension is not possible if third years want to showcase at Graduate Fashion Week. FTI had a good one-way and booking system, so it would be easy to return to this. Graduate Fashion Week is an unmissable event for them, as it is their opportunity to gain internships and make business connections. Extensions would not make a difference to third years. However, second years would like the option of a deadline extension as they want to catch up on all the missed workshops, make garments and want to be prepared for going into third year.

GA

- **Post-Graduate** representatives expressed a similar concern for group projects, as Games Academy have done well moving online, but this term it is critical to integrate well as a team. An extension would give them access to VR equipment as they cannot do SB2 without equipment. However, due to the nature of the course being a 12-month course, if there was to be an extension, could the option of being able to submit SB2 assessments at the end of SB3 then have a knock-on effect with SB3 assessments be submitted later?
- **Undergraduates** have expressed how not having the facilities at home to produce the same quality means they would massively benefit from the facilities being open sooner, especially as their COVID-19 protocols were so well enforced. Plus, they have also wondered if there could be an option for students who finish on time to submit all assignments at the regular term end, but students who are not finished get longer with full access to facilities. An optional extension would be the clearest choice for students (but no longer than mid-June), as having students longer into the summer period than intended would only benefit from keeping it optional (as student's mental health could suffer if they were made to stay).

IOP

- Third year **Photography** students primarily still want to graduate in July, so an April deadline would be best. However, they have also expressed the opinion that, like December, a 2-week grace period after their deadline would be appreciated. Also, over

summer they request free access and, at minimum, monthly COVID-19 testing of every student on campus using the facilities, so that students that do not secure jobs can practice their art and better their portfolio.

- **Press and Ed** second years wanted to raise the point that the quality of online education needs to be better, and students need to be better supported. They then went on to state that there should be more clarification on the modules before hand in and there should also be more communication between the staff members and the students.

SADI

- The **Interior Design** first years are quite happy to carry on as this term will pan out, and want to keep the same deadlines, as it is important to keep in mind student's mental health. Shortening the summer with extended deadlines might impact returning to university. However, third years have said the extension is very much needed to them, so believe that 3rd year priority is an effective way to look at it.
- **Sustainable Product Design** wanted 2 – 6 weeks extensions and for the facilities to be open at some point over summer. They expressed those who do not get job would benefit from the use the facilities over summer. However, they also agreed that extensions need to be made on a course-by-course basis.
- **Illustration BA** have asked that facilities need to be open longer into the summer to reflect the time that the lockdown has taken away from them, also their deadlines NEED to be adjusted accordingly.
- **Illustration MA** has said that adapting to either of these solutions does not make a difference to MA students as they are here until September anyway.

SOE

- **Creative Events Management** have conveyed that there are many people who have other responsibilities, and they might not want to have an extension.

SOC

- No representatives were present, but I will try and speak to them separately.

SOFT

- Third year **film** have voiced one of the biggest needs for the extension in use of facilities. They see it as important and invaluable for their successful continuation of their degree, because blended learning within the original deadline will not work for them. There is the problem of practical film projects and one person in your crew deciding not to extend, however, I think this a more case by case basis. Having a deadline extension assessment for practical modules would be appreciated, but also offering students the option submit early would be 'pleasing' everyone. They believe it would be a relief to students to have it and boost morale.
- **TV** have said that extensions in both would be useful, as it would be too much pressure to film at the end of term. An extension would counteract the missing parts of the term. Again, their practical modules would benefit most, whereas writing and academics could be done to the original deadline.
- **Post-Graduate Prosthetics** is primarily practical and again consists of three study blocks, so would also suffer from the rolling effect of extending assessments and would not want assessment to fall into the next year. However, they would love the facilities open as it is facility heavy.

Issues Raised in Common

The issues raised in common were that of accommodation, placements/ employability opportunities, Covid-19 implications, and mental health impacts on stress.

- If the option is to extend by a significant amount of time, the impact on **accommodation** would have to be looked at. Those in university accommodation and those in private agreements might need to be helped financially in order to stay (if applicable) or be granted access to university-owned accommodation over the extension period if private/ university tenancy agreements have ended. The reps voiced some opinions on how to help this, as if the extended period were in keeping within the timeframe of most student contracts (typically end of June) it would steer away from disadvantaging students. The major focus will be on international students and how they can be accommodated to stay here, so they are not disadvantaged in any way by their student status.
- Another issue raised is that the extension time may impact **placements and employment** options students may want to gain. The summer start dates for placements are usually the May/ June time, so this needs to be considered. However, this is not all students, and those that it does affect should be given access to an earlier submission date. Across the board, projects set by tutors should reflect the appropriate amount of time students have access to the facilities for.
- Students also have their concerns that opening the facilities too early this term will have an impact on **COVID-19** cases. This will most directly impact our vulnerable community, so consideration for how to ensure that they feel safe and have equal opportunity will be important, as well as prioritising the safety of the rest of the student community. In response to this, student reps have requested stricter monitoring of mask usage on campus, more on-campus testing routinely and improvements of the existing booking system for ease. These steps would help the majority feel safer and allow them to get back into the facilities.
- The impact on student's **mental health** was the overarching theme of concern amongst the reps. Opening the facilities early (if government permits) may impact students who are caring for family or put pressure on students to travel back. Yet would positively impact those of our student community that need the extra time, like FTI for example. However, extending the assessment period by a significant amount could apply added stress to students to stay, and produce unachievable expectations. This also impacts our internationals and vulnerable students as they may experience increased stress from not being able to access facilities if they are unable to return to university this term. Therefore, some may prefer to submit on the earlier original deadline with smaller and simpler briefs, and appropriate expectation of work produced in the term time.

Summary

In the company of 42 student representatives speaking on behalf of 8 out of the 9 schools, we primarily had a positive response to Question 2. Overall, they were in complete agreement that regardless of the change in Government guidelines and/ or Falmouth's decision in response to this, they, as a student collective would like the below actions made available to them as soon as possible. This, in agreement, is so they can conduct the 'practical' degree they paid and signed up for without disadvantage:

1. The use of the University owned Kit/ Equipment for when they are allowed back (with a revised covid-19 investment to see what can be done with allowing students to take them out more frequently)
2. The University facilities to be open and free for use over the whole summer by all our students.

Keeping the facilities open over summer will adhere to the needs of our vulnerable student community, as they will be able to continue with their online education and submit online but

will still be able to access the facilities over summer (in a less densely populated time) if they so wish to. There is, however, a big emphasis needed on internationals and making sure they are not disadvantaged by not being able to access the facilities or the extension because of having to leave to return home.

Regarding **assessments and extension**, I've made a few observations. Students all-in-all would prefer a course-by-course decision, as for example, SOFT and FSA courses need a definite substantial extension (especially those in third year), but IOP and SADI are happy with the original deadlines but would appreciate a smaller extension if needed.

Overall, 7 out of 9 schools (SOE AND SOC not included) representing undergraduates said they were happy with an extension if it did not extend past the end of most tenancy contracts and did not demand that they produce unachievable work. Rather, they would prefer if the extension were optional, or there was a grace period that students had the choice to use. Autonomy is key here.

This is because, AMATA, SOFT and GA have more complex opinions surrounding group projects this term. However, if they were happy with deciding on what they were doing as a team early on (regarding when they submit), they would be able to avoid losing members at crucial times and finish as a team. FTI third years face a complex situation due to their Graduate Fashion Week as they are worried about not being able to attend this event.

An 'X-week grace period' system for undergraduates would give those the choice to submit early, but also have X number of extra weeks in the facilities if needed and/or wanted. This X will come down to when they can return to the facilities come the end of lockdown.

Postgraduates, from 3 of the 9 schools in attendance, were also in agreement that they wanted and needed to access facilities for their projects this term. The time frame of their courses needs to be taken into a different consideration, as they do not want pushed back assessments or alterations to the study block to have a knock-on effect for their next study block, pushing assessments into the next year. This needs to be discussed further.

Taking all the above into consideration, we ask that you take into consideration everything that the student representatives have voiced. As a President, I want to help raise the voice of the students with the support of the university. Therefore, I want to apply pressure by writing to Guild HE (Lizzy is writing) asking for them to advocate on behalf of small and specialist universities. Consequently, in a letter led by Eva Jiggins (a student representative), supported by Peter Cox, we are now in conversation with the MP of Truro and Falmouth Cheryl Mackrory, who has written to Michelle Donelan MP to reconsider her statements around facilities.

Thank you for listening to your students, and we hope for a more proactive 2021.

Signed,



Elizabeth Marshall – Falmouth President and All Reps in Attendance
Isabelle Kinghorn – Education Officer
42 Student Representatives