

# The Student Life Survey

Understanding Student Perceptions and Experiences: Building an  
Evidence-Based Approach to Future Engagement



# Introduction

At the beginning of the 2024/25 academic year, we created a research project (The Getting Started Survey) which centred around informing Falmouth & Exeter Students' Union with valuable data related to student expectations, priorities and experiences. The project helped identify what matters to students during university and created a clear database to inform the work we undertake. However, it is recognised that understanding the student journey and perspective is not a linear process, thus resulting in the need to further research how perceptions change through the year and gathering a better understanding into these changes.

As such, we launched a further research project to assess whether perceptions of The SU altered at different points in the academic year and to also create a better understanding of the student experience from this academic year.

The SU launched an online survey in April, which was promoted via newsletters, social media and face to face interaction with students. This achieved a total of (at highest) 162 responses. The results of the survey were then analysed using a range of methods including statistical & thematic analysis. This report serves two main purposes. The first is to understand how the student perception to The SU differs across different points of the academic year and secondly, to identify how we can continually develop our offering to meet the needs of students and contribute to the improvement of the student experience.

## Aims and Objectives

*The overall aim of this research is to build on our evidence base to help understand student the student perception and experience, to inform our future work.*

*This will be supported by the following objectives:*

- To understand how the perception of The SU differs at different points in the academic year;*
- To understand student's experience during the 2024/25 academic year;*
- To produce a set of recommendations, activities and best practice example of how to engage students for our future work.*



# About you

## What does the data tell us?

- 42% of respondents rated the 2024/25 academic year as a 4 (with 5 being the best);
- Academic workload or pressure, financial difficulties, and mental health challenges were the most common barriers faced by respondents;
- Students chose cost of living, employability and wellbeing & support as their priorities (when given options from this academic year and next years' sabbatical officers' priority work);
- Student highlights most commonly centre around social connections & friendships;
- Students are facing issues with transport & accessibility and accommodation.

## What does this mean?

Whilst many students appreciate the unique community offered by studying here, the issues in transport reliability and cost as well as accommodation costs impacts the overall student experience negatively. Social connections and friendships are continually a priority for students with cost of living, employability and wellbeing & support being clear areas of interest.

## What are students saying?

*"Cringy but the people I've met and friendships I've made or strengthened with people on my course, in societies, at uni and in Falmouth."*

*"The buses from Penryn to Falmouth can be unreliable."*

*"The housing market was absolutely shocking to navigate..."*



# Activities & Events

## What does the data tell us?

- 47% of respondents are members of at least one student group;
- Time constraints, academic workload and financial difficulties remain the top barrier to participation to student groups;
- 54% of respondents attended at least one event this year;
- When looking at events that students enjoyed the most, those centred around connection, relief, experience and development were most popular;
- Students would also value more events that link to: inclusivity & culture; nature & wellness; creative activities; employability; accessibility & reach; and non-drinking socials.

## What does this mean?

As reiterated throughout this research, opportunities for social connection remains at the forefront of students' minds with this reflected in participation with activities and events. There is clear opportunity to develop events that can support the student experience as well as focusing on professional & personal development.

## What are students saying?

*"Kayaking is where i have found friends for life and learnt the most"*

*"Definitely all the socials. The socials have enabled the members of the society to become a lot closer. For example, at the dance competitions, after spending hours on a coach, and having to stay with each other in a hotel, we automatically bonded."*



# Food

## What does the data tell us?

- 18% of respondents have attended Free Soup Friday;
- 95% of those who attended would recommend Free Soup Friday or already have;
- Students lack awareness to some of the schemes available and would like them expanded to other campuses as well as Penryn.

## What does this mean?

Food initiatives such as Free Soup and the pantry remain popular amongst students however there is a lack of awareness to these schemes and therefore a new approach to communicating with students around these may be needed.

## What are students saying?

*“The pantry's tinned soups and pastas have been the difference between me having nothing for dinner versus me being able to have an actual, nourishing meal.”*

*“Would love for Free Soup Friday to carry on... It would be nice to see it on Woodlane campus as well as Penryn!”*

*“Should continue to do schemes like these but also to advertise them more as I had not heard about it.”*



# Representation

## What does the data tell us?

- 53% of respondents feel represented by a joint Students' Union but there is still a lot of uncertainty and lack of knowledge around this;
- 63% of respondents know at least one Officer;
- 21% of respondents know who has been elected for next year;
- The average rating of how represented students feel was 6.3 (with 10 being extremely represented).

## What does this mean?

There is a need for further awareness amongst students on what The SU is and how it represents them. Whilst it is positive that students are aware of those who represent them (in terms of Officers), respondents largely have a neutral response to how represented they feel.



# Advice & Support

## What does the data tell us?

- 68% of respondents have accessed support whilst at University;
- Peer to peer support was the most commonly accessed amongst respondents (51% friends/family and 43% coursemates);
- 21% of respondents did not find the support effective ranking it a 1, whilst 23% ranked it an 8 and thus finding it effective.

## What does this mean?

Support is an aspect of University that does not achieve an equitable experience for all students. Whilst many find that they access support which is effective, others feel that it is difficult to access support and that the service needs improving. There is a clear need to better communicate how students can book appointments and where to go for support as well as exploring further peer to peer options.

## What are students saying?

*"Horrific, support at this University is disgraceful and non existent. Securing a wellbeing appointment is harder than securing a GP appointment and god forbid you should attempt to get an appointment with the SU, every time you check there are no appointments available for a whole month... It's disgraceful and the universities should be embarrassed."*

*"I only used the support on campus when they reached out to me first regarding something I was going through. I think that reaching out to students when the uni knows of something they are struggling with encourages them to utilise the support available"*

*"Wherever I went for support, I came away feeling that my questions had been fully answered and I was even given additional useful information on multiple occasions"*



