



Representation Survey 2023

In October 2023, UPSU conducted a survey of the student body to gauge student opinion regarding aspects of the current representation system and preferred priorities and engagement methods moving forward.

The survey, hosted through the UPSU website and only open to University of Plymouth students, was open between 15th-30th October 2023 and offered incentives of entry to a prize draw to win 1 x £100 and 1 of 4 £20 shopping vouchers.

A total of 1,202 students completed the survey. Of these, 10 respondents had no demographic data associated with their profile and have been excluded from this report.

[Link to survey data](#)

	No of Respondents	Total UoP population	Faculty engagement
Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Business	404 (33.7%)	7325 (28.9%)	5.5%
Faculty of Health	429 (35.7%)	9340 (36.8%)	4.6%
Faculty of Science & Engineering	326 (26.8%)	4744 (18.7%)	6.7%
Academic Partners	31 (2.6%)	3740 (14.7%)	0.8%
UPIC	14 (1.2%)	233 (0.9%)	6%
Total	1,192 (100%)	25,382 (100%)	4.7%

Table 1. Headcount and percentage survey respondents per Faculty and by total UoP population as of 14/11/23

Respondents by Faculty

Broadly speaking, the spread of respondents to the survey by Faculty was in line with that of the overall university population by Faculty, with the exception of Academic Partners. Of the 31 respondents from Academic Partners, all except five were international students. Of the 7 partner institutions represented by respondents, only 2 were UK based partners which the SU has a relationship with (Dartington Trust and Truro and Penwith). At this time, UPSU does not have a relationship with international partners, as per the UPSU Membership Byelaw.

Engagement in the survey was slightly higher from the Faculty of Science and Engineering then would be average for the faculty breakdown across the university population.

Anecdotally, this could be attributed to the increase in engagement and the development of relationships, both between the SU and academic staff, and engagement with student representatives in the student academic representation system by student body, over the past three years. This academic year started with all Faculty of Science and Engineering School Representatives elected in the previous academic year, this has not been the case for any Faculty for a number of years.

Importance of student views to be represented whilst at university

Overall, 99% of respondents thought that it was 'very important' 81% or 'quite important' 18% for students views to be represented whilst at university. Of the 1% of students who said it was 'not important', all had 'little awareness' or 'no awareness' of how representatives work on their behalf and were 'unsure' or had 'no confidence' that student representatives can make improvements for students at university.

Eight of the nine respondents who said that it was 'not important' for student views to be represented, said they would focus representation primarily on academic feedback and/or academic support and/ or course/ learning experience. Only one student in this group prioritised focus on commercial service and extra-curricular provision.

Awareness and Confidence

The correlation between awareness of how student representatives currently work on behalf of students and confidence in representatives being able to make improvements at university, was apparent. Of the 693 (58%) responses saying they had either 'a little' (494 – 41%) or 'a lot' (199 – 17%) of awareness of the current student representatives work, 572 (48%) respondents were 'confident' (391 – 33%) or 'very confident' (181– 15%) in their ability to make improvements for students at university.

Representative focus

Respondents were asked where they would focus representation at university to have the greatest impact on your university experience. Overall, themes were broadly consistent across the demographic groups. The priorities for students were; academic support (882 – 68%), course/learning experience (810 – 63%) and academic feedback (730 – 57%). Student welfare was also a top priority with (747 - 58%) of students selecting this option.

Notable differences were postgraduate taught students who prioritised careers and employability support (63%), ahead of student welfare and course/learning experience (both 62%), and second only to academic support (68%). Postgrad research students gave highest priority to academic feedback (67%), although academic support and student welfare were still above 60% in this group.

There was also a difference between home and international students and the value placed on careers and employability. Only 40% of home students selected this option, opposed to 59% of international students.

Accommodation was also a priority for international students (45%) and for postgraduate taught students (45%). Of the 387 (32%) international students that completed the survey, 192 (50%) were on a postgrad taught programme and 23 (6%) on a postgraduate research pathway.

First year students placed slightly more value on sports and exercise (30%) and entertainments and events (39%) than the overall average, but the headline priorities remained the same.

Representative activities

'Collecting student opinion' was the top activity that students thought their representatives should be undertaking, with 84% (1001) of students selecting this option. This was followed by 'speaking on behalf of students with the university' (894-75%), 'providing feedback to students' (787-66%) and 'speaking on behalf of students with the local community' (512-43%)

There was an increase in the percentage of international (50%) and postgrad taught (54%) students that thought that representatives should be 'speaking on behalf of students with the local community'. As noted previously, there is some overlap with these groups. The percentage of respondents in these demographic groups also ranked 'speaking on behalf of students nationally' higher than the overall average, but it was still less than 50%.

Do staff value student representation?

A total of 269 (23%) students thought that 'all staff' value student representation, 632 (53%) said 'most staff', 19 (2%) said they 'didn't know'. One student said that 'no staff' value student representation, they were an undergraduate, home student from the Faculty of Science and Engineering in their third year.

Of the students that answered that 'some staff' valued representation 203 (17%), 61 (30%) were from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business, 67 (33%) from Faculty of Health and 70 (35%) from Faculty of Science and Engineering. Four respondents (2%) were from Academic Partners and one from UPIC.

Preference on decision making

Overall, students' preference was that representatives consulted with students before meetings and made decisions based on their findings (42%). This was the most preferred answer, other than with Postgraduate Research students who would rather that representatives consult with them before meetings and then check back again before a final decision is made (35%).

Communication

Generally, email was the most preferred method across all groups, to both share their views (71%) and to hear back any outcomes (82%) with the next preferred choice being social media to share views (47%) and to be informed of outcomes (53%). The use of a specific digital system or app was appealing to 40% of respondents who would like to use this method of sharing views.

There was a greater appetite to attend meetings from postgraduate taught students, with 50% choosing this method to give feedback, second only to email (83%). When hearing about outcomes, meetings (47%) was third choice for postgrad taught students behind email (88%) and social media (51%). These trends also followed for international students.

Student Voice across the institution

All groups thought it was important for their voice to be heard at a programme, school and faculty level, as well as across the university. The general trend across all groups was for the number of students selecting 'low' importance to increase at each level of university hierarchy, moving away from their programme. For example, when considering overall data, only 3% of respondents said it was of 'low' importance for their voice to be heard at programme level. This increased to 6% at School level, 9% at Faculty level and 11% university wide.

Importance of voice within the student groups did vary across demographic with 60% of first year students giving a ranking of 'high' importance and only 4% ranking it as 'low'. Postgraduate research students placed less importance on voice within the student group with only 48% rating it with 'high' importance and 'low' importance increasing to 17%.

Postgrad research students were also more likely to be dissatisfied with how well their voice is heard across the institution, with a 'poor' rating being given by 15% of students at the school level, far higher than the overall 'poor' rating at school level, which was only 5%.

Postgraduate research students gave higher 'poor' rating across every level of the university. However, they also had the highest 'excellent' rating at a programme level. Suggesting that they generally have a positive experience on their programme but feel isolated outside of this. This is consistent with anecdotal feedback from Postgrad Research students.

Appendix 1 - Student Representation Questions

Q1. How important do you feel it is for student views to be represented whilst at University?

- Not important
- Quite important
- Very Important
- Not sure

Q2. How much do you feel that you are aware of how student representatives currently work on your behalf?

- Not at all
- Not much
- A little
- A lot
- Not sure

Q3. How much impact do you think student representatives have in making your university a better place?

- No impact at all
- Low
- High Medium
- Not sure

Q4 How confident are you that student representatives can make improvements for you at university?

- Not at all confident
- Not confident
- Confident
- Very confident
- Not sure

Q5. Where would you focus representation at university to have the greatest impact on your university experience?

- Academic feedback
- Academic support
- Administration and communications
- Careers and employability
- Entertainment and events
- Extra-curricular activities
- Food and drink outlets
- My course / learning experience
- Social space on campus
- Sport and exercise
- Student accommodation
- Student community
- Student welfare
- Study space on campus

Q6. What type of activities do you feel are important for representatives to undertake?

- Collecting students' opinions
- Speaking on behalf of students with the university

- Providing feedback to students
- Speaking in behalf of students with the local community
- Running events
- Speaking on behalf of students nationally
- Running campaigns

Q7. Please rate the importance that your voice is heard to help improve you university experience in the following areas:

- Programme
- School
- Faculty
- University wide
- Student groups

Q8. Do you feel that university staff value representation?

- No staff
- Some staff
- Most staff
- All Staff
- Don't know

Q9. How do you prefer your student representatives to make decisions for you?

- They make decisions on your behalf without your involvement
- They make decisions on your behalf and then tell you what they have done
- They consult with you before meetings and make decisions based on their findings
- They consult with you before meetings and check back with you before final decisions are made
- I don't care how decisions are made
- Don't know

Q10. How would you prefer to share your views to student representatives?

- Email
- Social media
- Meetings
- A specific digital platform
- Website
- I don't care
- Don't know

Q11. How would you prefer your student representatives to share outcomes with you?

- Email
- Social media
- Meetings
- A specific digital platform
- Website
- I don't care
- Don't know

Q12. Overall, how would you rate how well you voice is heard within the following areas to improve your experience at uni?

- Programme
- School
- Faculty
- University wide
- Student groups