



DEAR VC

Feedback Report

November 2019-February 2020

Chester Students Union

Rio Hall, CSU Vice President
Activities

What is 'Dear VC'?

'Dear VC' is a campaign that Chester Students' Union (CSU) ran in the academic year 2019/2020. With Professor Eunice Simmons starting in January 2020 as the new Vice Chancellor (VC) at the University of Chester, the aim of the campaign was to collect feedback from current University of Chester students about what they think is great about the University, and what they think the VC should focus on improving. The feedback received was given to the VC in February 2020 and the idea to create action plan was agreed as to how the University will make change, based on the students' feedback.

How did we collect the data?

The data was collected physically on feedback cards that were double sided. Each side offered a box for students to write their positive and negative feedback on. We also released an online survey on our website, chestersu.com, that students could fill in if they were not able to fill in a physical card. This enabled us to target hard to reach students across 9 sites. We used our Union on Tour initiative to get to all campuses with the feedback cards and engage in conversation with students around current student needs and what they needed to have the best student experience.

There were 12 themes that formulated as a result of the feedback. These themes were:

Staff – Predominately academic staff, any comments made about their support/friendliness etc

Transport – Comments on inter-campus buses

Sports and Societies – Sports and Societies across all sites

Support Services – Student Futures, Study Skills, LIS

Course – Comments made about courses

Facilities – Buildings, access to microwaves/hot water

Community – Community feel between campuses and at individual sites

Events – The Bar and Bar Twenty10, along with daytime events at campuses e.g. careers fest

Accommodation – University owned accommodation

Food – food provided at University owned catering outlets

SU – any issues surrounding societies, student council, SERs

Parking – parking across all sites

Results

We had 683 feedback cards filled out, totalling over 1500 comments.

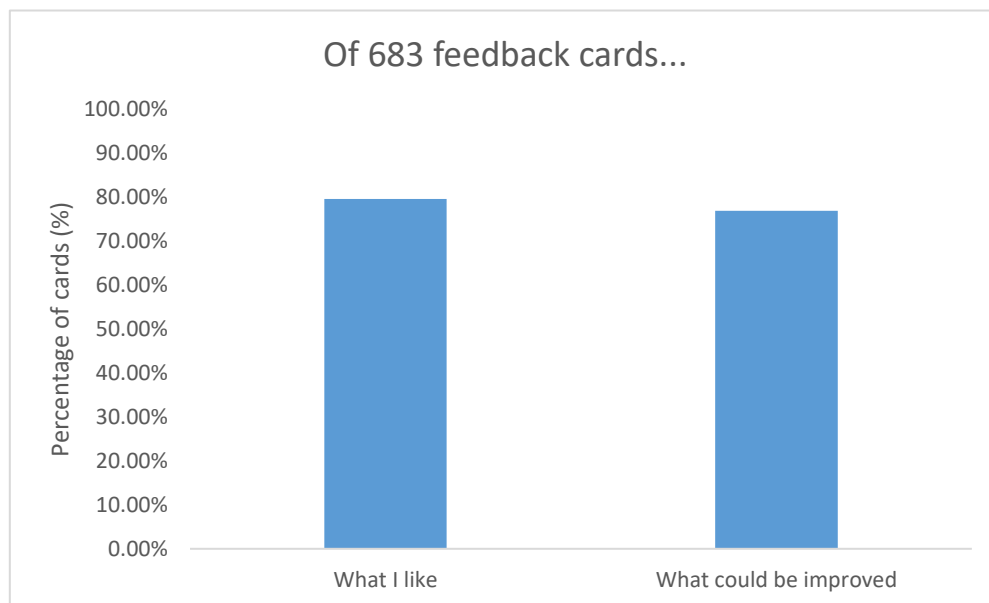


Figure 1 shows the total number of feedback cards and how they were split across the two categories.

The results show that around 10% of the student population gave both positive and improvement feedback. We then noticed themes were occurring in the feedback so split the data to fit into one of themes, as shown in Figure 2. The data was also compatible with sites, as physical cards were collected and grouped site by site, as well as an option to say which site you were based at online. Each site had different areas which they felt needed improving. It was fantastic that we gathered more positive feedback than we did negative, demonstrating how much the University already does for its students. This shows that students at Chester are happy with many aspects of their student life. It is also evident from

figure 3, that the largest percentage of responses came from Parkgate Road. This comes as no surprise due to the high number of courses being delivered at this site.

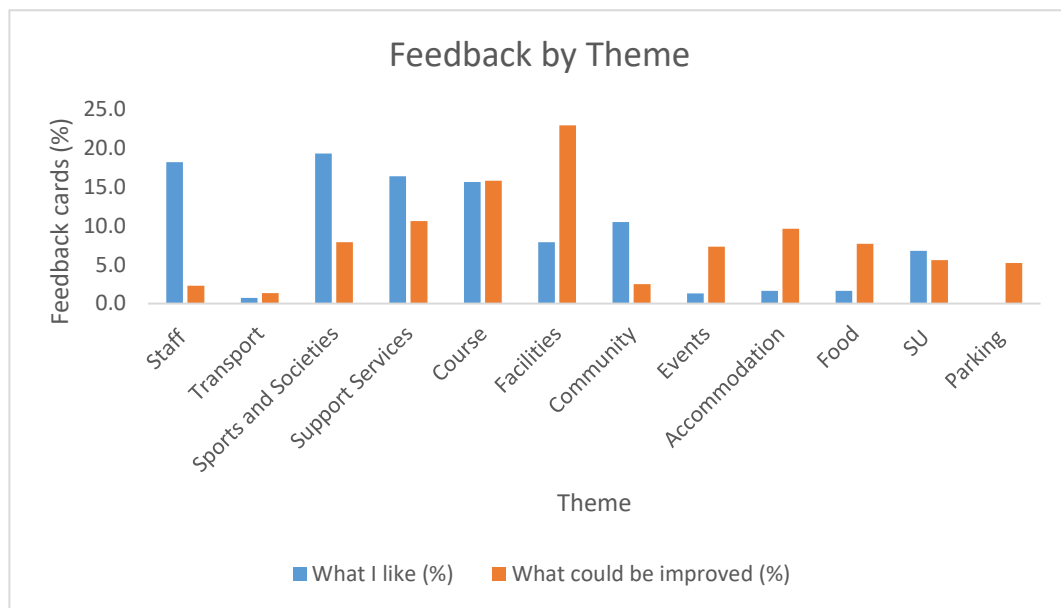


Figure 2 shows the themes the feedback created, and how the feedback was split across the themes.

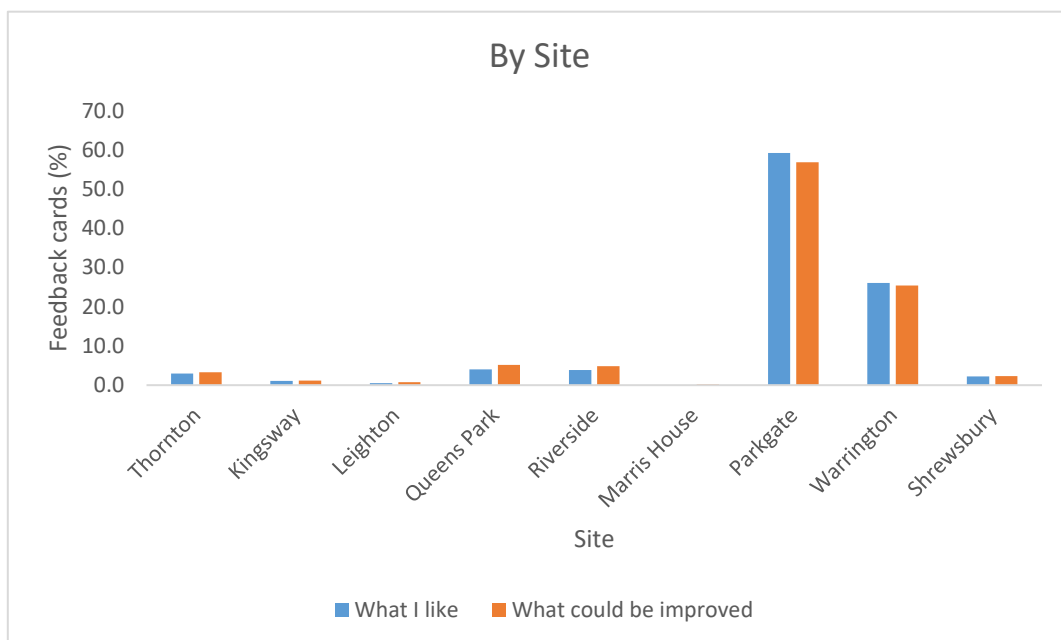


Figure 3 shows the dispersion of feedback per site.

Parkgate Road

At Parkgate Road the most common positive response came under the 'Sports and Societies' theme with over 25% of total responses (figure 4). Students frequently mentioned how being involved in extra-curricular activity has really helped with their retention at University. In total there are over 3,500 students involved in sports and societies. CSU has over 80 societies across all campuses and the University of Chester Athletics' Union encompasses 72 sports across all sites. Students mentioned that joining a student group is another way to make friends at university. It is also frequently mentioned by students that sports and societies are ran well and that they are genuinely content with this aspect of their student life.

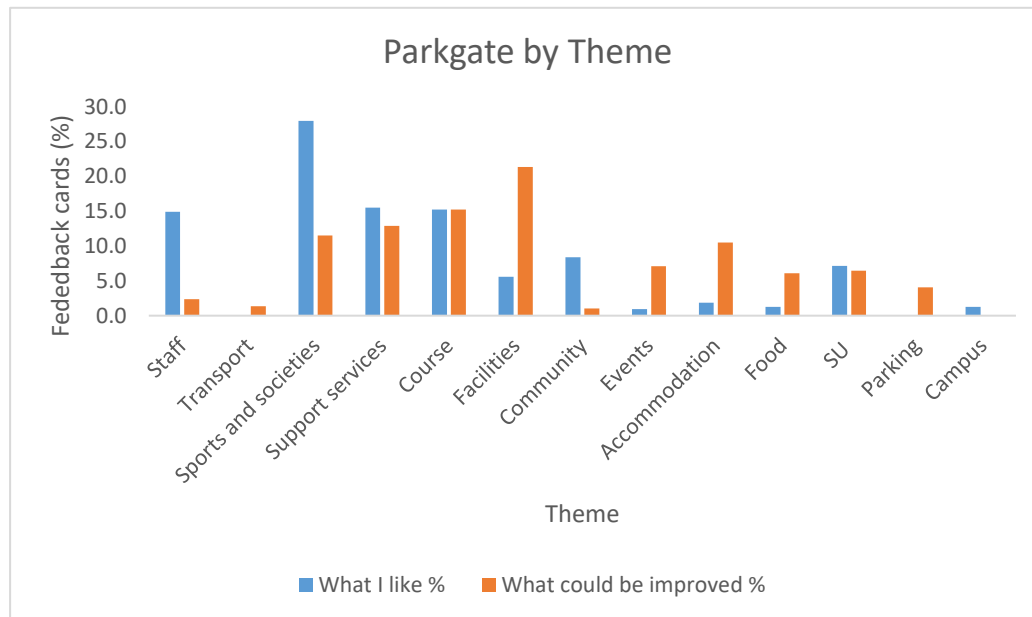


Figure 4 shows how the feedback from Parkgate Road was split across the themes, and the percentage of positive and negative comments for each.

Rio Hall, CSU Vice President Activities stated, "the University of Chester and Chester Students' Union should be proud of their partnership and pride themselves upon the fact that they offer this wonderful community feeling through offering extra-curricular activities. Students at Chester feel part of a wider family by participating in activity and this has ultimately helped with retention. Sports and Societies are something the SU and University should continue to develop and improve to enhance the student experience further, as well as continuing to use them as a great unique selling point for future students."

The most negatively commented theme by students was 'Facilities', which totalled over 20% of negative responses. The feedback continuously showed that many of the buildings feel outdated and do not reflect the modern university life. Students mentioned how having more social spaces with kettles, microwaves and toasters would improve their university experience, as well as having more available computers with high level course specific software's in the library, such as the Thornton Image, currently only available at Thornton and 10 computers in Seaborne Library. Other students mentioned the need for an update of the sports facilities.

Warrington

Warrington students provided very different feedback in comparison to Parkgate Road. With Warrington being predominately a professional courses campus, many aspects of student life that students at Parkgate Road experience, is not mirrored in Warrington.

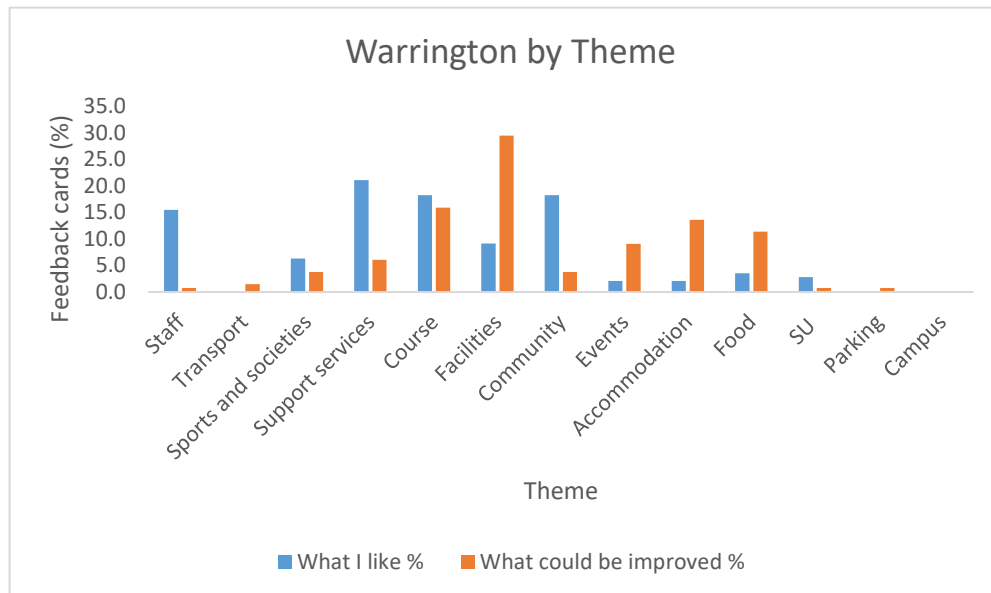


Figure 5 shows the how the feedback from Warrington was split across the themes, positive and negative.

It was fantastic to see that the theme, 'support services' was the most common positive response to Dear VC from Warrington students (Figure 5). There were comments about the Student Futures Wellbeing Team's fantastic work. Students said they felt extremely supported by support staff at Warrington. It is clear at Warrington there is a huge community feel. Students explained to us how all staff and students are a part of this community and that this feel is what makes Warrington such a unique part of the University of Chester.

The most negatively commented theme at Warrington was 'facilities'. 30% of negative responses from Warrington students were on this theme (Figure 5). Many comments mentioned how much of Warrington campus looks 'outdated', particularly the accommodation. There were also frequent comments how there isn't adequate facilities for commuting students to heat up their own food and make hot drinks, as much of the Warrington demographic is now commuting. This was mentioned across all campuses, showing that there is a clear need for more social spaces for students, with facilities such as free hot water and microwaves. Other Warrington feedback included that the canteen needs improvement and A/C and heating facilities in some lecture theatres do not work.

Jack Appleby, CSU Vice President Warrington stated, "The comments made above come as no surprise to me, after spending 5 years at Warrington I too echo the comments made by students. I'm so glad our students at Warrington have taken their opportunity to voice their opinions and I can only hope for great things to happen moving forward at our Warrington Campus"

Shrewsbury

University Centre Shrewsbury (UCS) is also a unique campus with a community feel. The most positively commented on theme was 'staff' and 'community' with over 30% of positive responses (as shown in figure 6). Students commented how well supported they felt by staff and in discussion with the Officers have said that they feel that they are happy based at Shrewsbury and feel as though they get a much more tailored approach to support with assignments.

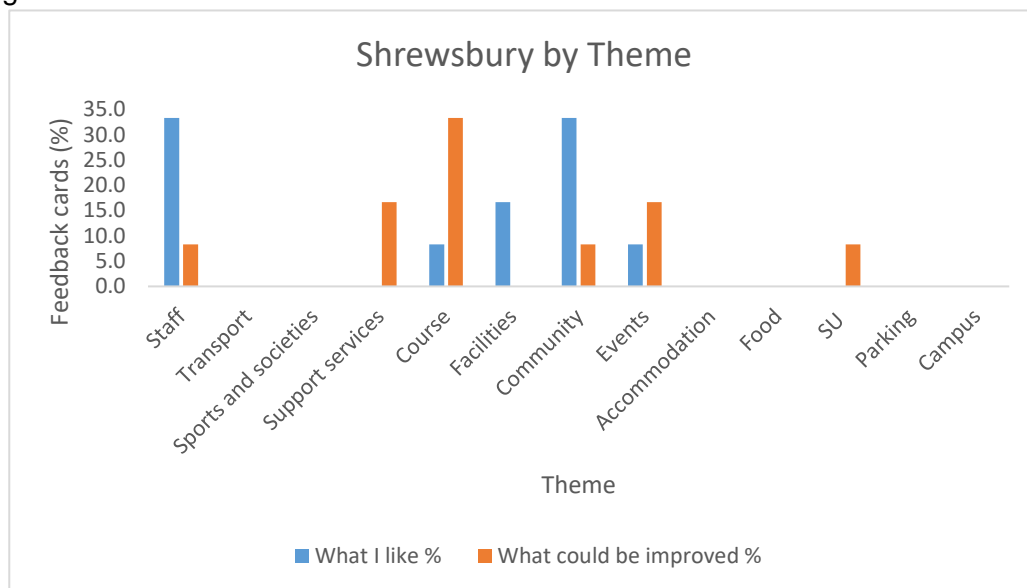


Figure 6 show how the feedback was split across the themes at Shrewsbury, positive and negative.

Quite contrastingly to the number of positive comments about staff and support, some negative comments at Shrewsbury included that Personal Academic Tutors (PATs) had a slow response rate and that this was hindering students' studies. We are aware of this USP of PATs that we offer at Chester, and how the influence of a PAT can be the difference between a student staying or leaving the University. Melanie Hooper, CSU Vice President Education said, "at the start of the new year I started a PAT campaign where I conducted a survey to gage an idea of how students feel about the PAT system and whether they find it effective or not. The results from this interlink with Rio's Dear VC study as there were a number of comments stating how the response rate from PATs often left the students feeling as if they had little support."

Courteney Ayre, CSU Vice President Shrewsbury commented "The community feeling at Shrewsbury is, in my perspective, second to none. Students have good relationships with staff right up to the levels of Anna Sutton and Paul Kirkbright, and always feel that there is a staff member available to lend a hand for whatever each student needs. However, students at UCS would benefit a lot more from extra support from the wider University of Chester community, as they often say they feel left out, or to quote a student, "like we're not as important because we don't study at Chester or Warrington". The PATs of some students at UCS are often Chester-based lecturers, which can sometimes make things difficult if a student needs to meet with their PAT as a matter of urgency, and students would largely appreciate this being addressed by senior management."

Queens Park

At Queens Park it was great to see that the most positive theme was 'Staff'. It was commonly commented by students how the staff within the Business School are extremely welcoming and engaging. Students told us how the staff had made them feel empowered. This is fantastic to hear, and students are extremely grateful of the hard work the staff put in to delivering these courses to such a high standard.

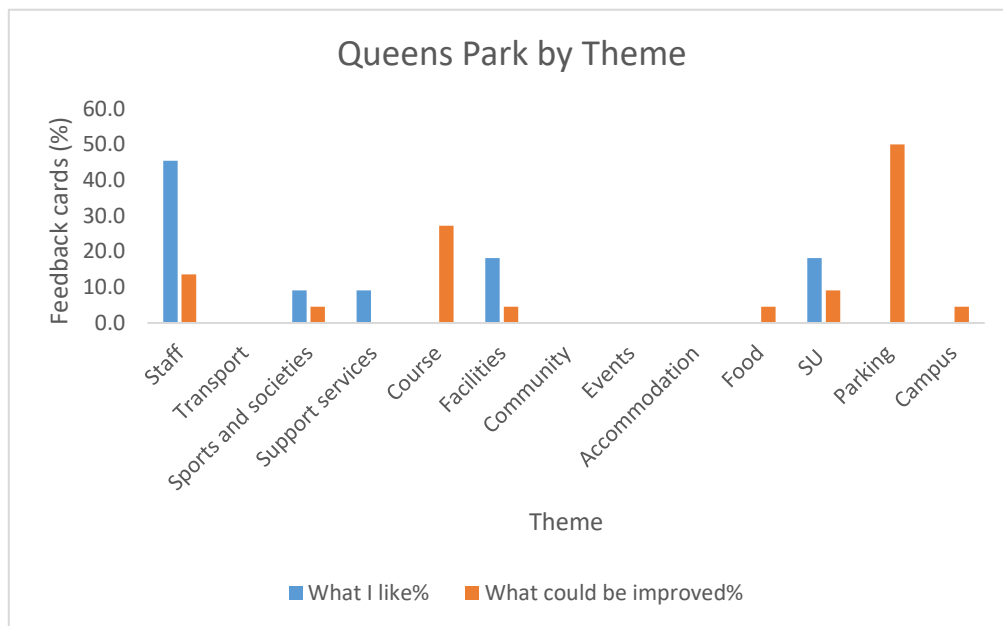


Figure 7 shows the feedback across themes at Queens Park, positive and negative.

The most negatively commented on was 'parking' at Queens Park, with over 40% of responses being on this theme (Figure 7). The lack of parking has been a problem for Queens Park for many years and is something students feel needs addressing. It is particularly a problem for students who commute by car. From speaking with students and seeing first-hand, they cannot understand why the barrier to the car park isn't used, particularly when car parking spaces are taken up by students studying in the nearby college, not our own staff and students. In recent discussions with the VC about the university wide parking problem, the VC suggested the University looks at more sustainable alternatives to travelling where possible.

Eleanor Lewis, CSU President commented "It's heart-warming to see students mostly share the same feelings towards staff at Queens Park, that they're supportive and engaging. The issue around parking comes up time and time again and I think a shift in the way we think about commuting to University needs to be led by the University if we are to see real change. I also think by using the barrier, the students that can only access the university by driving and have a parking permit for Queens Park, are more likely to have a better student experience knowing they can park and get to lectures on time".

RIVERSIDE

Riverside students positively commented on how well supported they felt by Riverside staff. Students said how the staff provide networking opportunities for nursing students and that all the lecturers have great experience within their relevant field.

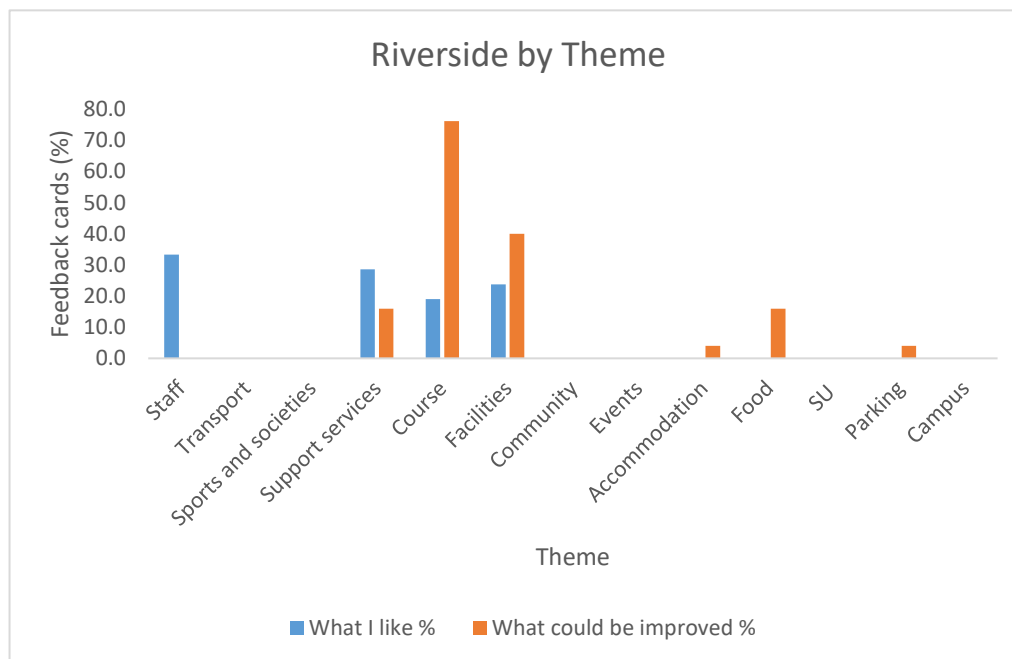


Figure 8 shows the feedback split across themes at Riverside, positive and negative.

On the other hand, over 70% of their negative feedback was based on their course. They commented that they often feel little support when they go out on placement and some mentioned the extreme workload placed on Nursing students. Melanie Hooper, CSU Vice President Education stated, “through the SER system, students are able to feed this sort of information back to lecturers. By doing this, lecturers can adapt the experience of the course to ensure this does not happen. Across the university, departments need to make use of SERS to ensure their students are happy with delivery of the course, deadlines and assessments.”

Students also mention that they have few social activities within their courses and with the wider University and SU. This is something CSU are aiming to improve. Rio Hall, CSU Vice President Activities commented “CSU are working to adapt events around courses such as nursing, so everyone has the ability to attend social events. We are looking particularly at Welcome Week and similar events for the March intake. This year we had a fast track for nursing students to ‘Fresher’s Fair’ and found this enabled more students to attend”.

Kingsway

Kingsway had over 40% of positive responses on the theme of 'staff' (Figure 9). It was commented how lecturers were extremely kind and supportive. It was also highlighted that the LIS team are very helpful and accommodating, due to the bespoke needs that Kingsway students have.

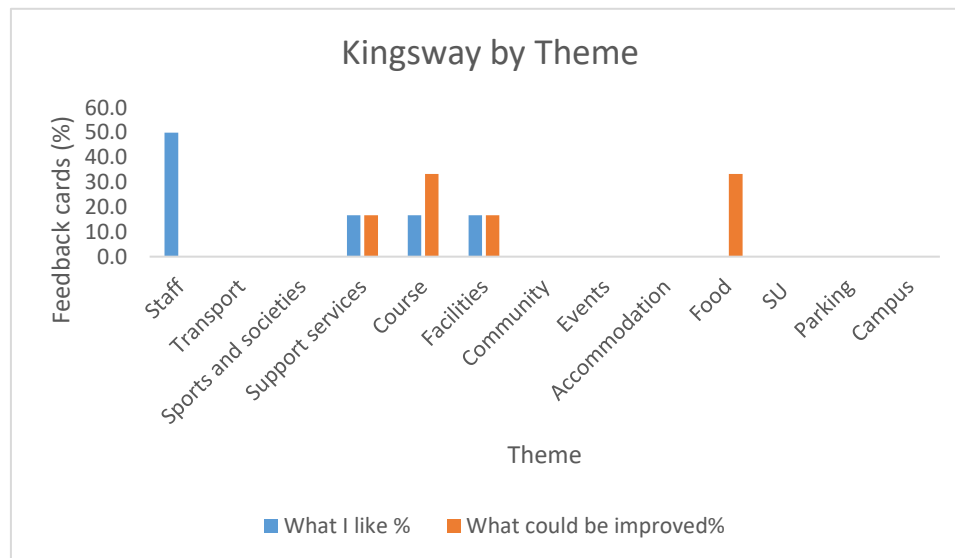


Figure 9 shows the dispersion of themes at Kingsway, positive and negative.

A majority of negative responses from Kingsway were on 'Food'. It was commonly commented that students felt there was little choice and that food supplies ran out quickly; this is a concern as Kingsway is away from the city centre with few nearby options to eat if the canteen runs out, many students are at Kingsway all day with short breaks and cannot leave to get food.

Courteney Ayre, CSU Vice President Shrewsbury expressed "Given Kingsway's status as a creative campus, it is encouraging to see the positive comments students have to make about LIS facilities and the support provided by lectures for courses that are often extremely demanding and challenging in many aspects. I believe concerns raised around food and catering could easily be looked at and should be done as a matter of urgency, due to the geographical location of the campus causing difficulties for students to get food otherwise."

Thornton

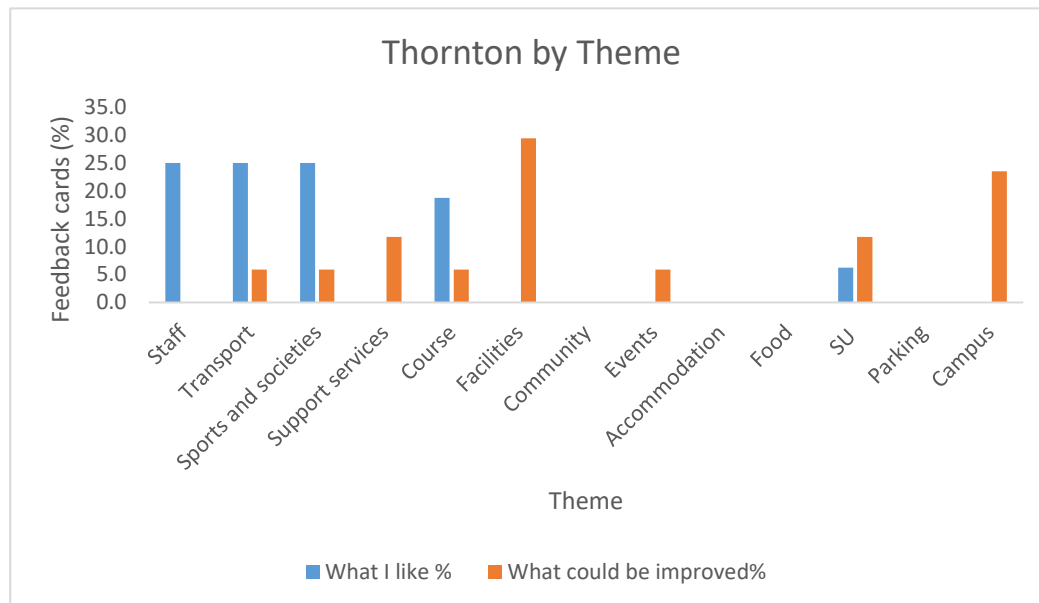


Figure 10 shows the split of themes at Thornton, positive and negative.

As seen in Figure 10, the themes, 'staff', 'transport' and 'sports and societies' are what came back as the highest percentage of positive responses at 25% each. It was highlighted how appreciative they are of the free bus service offered by the University to Thornton from Parkgate Road Campus. Students also mentioned about sports and societies and how participating in them has improved their student experience. There were also many comments again about staff. It is fantastic to hear the positive feedback about the hard work from staff which has really helped students with their studies.

Within the negative feedback, the most common response was about 'facilities'. It was frequently commented by many sports students at Thornton that they feel there is a need for more capacity with the sports facilities at Parkgate Road. The sports facilities are currently at maximum capacity daily and sports team are constantly requesting more time on facilities to improve their performance.

With students commuting to Thornton, many students use the Seaborne Library on Parkgate road and have commented that there is a lack of computers with the correct software for Thornton based courses. This needs addressing as a matter of urgency as only 12 computers in the Seaborne Library have the software that over 500 students need for projects, particularly when they cannot access Thornton at the weekend.

Melanie Hooper, CSU Vice President Education stated, "the lack of Thornton software is a rising issue with the uncertainty of the campus. This issue has been mentioned at numerous student council meetings and Student Experience Rep forums. Students are struggling to complete assignments in a timely matter without the appropriate software."

Marris House

Whilst we visited Marris House twice in between November and January, it was very hard to coordinate when we would reach the most students as many were on placements or in lectures when we visited. When there for 2-3 hours, no students came into the common room area, and so we were unable to gather feedback. We left feedback cards to collect at a later date, however none were filled out when we returned. There was no uptake online from Marris House either. This opens many avenues for us to explore as CSU over the coming months, with how best to engage with nursing students, particularly at Marris House and Leighton who are seemingly harder to reach than those at Riverside or Warrington.

Eleanor Lewis, CSU President commented “I am extremely keen to get back to Marris House and gather feedback for this at a later date. Whenever we visit Marris House and we speak to students they are always very interested in our projects, and always give us constructive feedback. This was evident when we visited during ‘Go Green Week’ and asked how they would like to see Marris House be more sustainable. It is a shame that when we visited there were no students available to give feedback, however we have a good relationship with the Administrator who is very helpful in coordinating us with busy days”.

Leighton

Leighton is our most unique site as students are based at a working hospital. We did not receive many responses from Leighton students. Very similar to Marris House, CSU felt that we should have spent more time at Leighton in order to gain a wider range and larger number of responses. Again, it is difficult to coordinate the best time to get the most students, particularly being in a hospital, however we did get some students, and all of the students we saw gave their feedback!

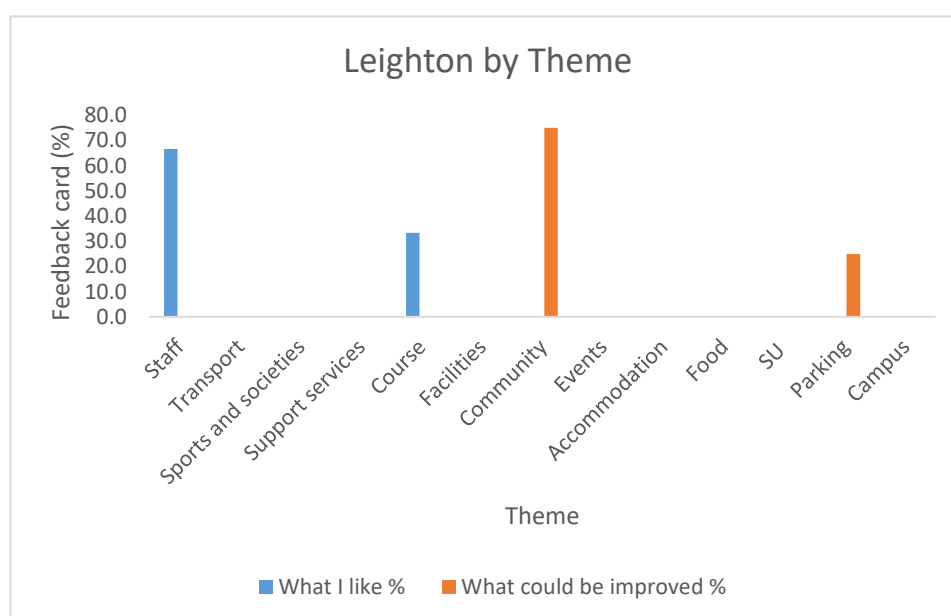


Figure 11 shows how the themes were split at Leighton, positive and negative.

From the feedback we did get, positive feedback from Leighton students was that staff were extremely supportive and that students were happy and enjoying their courses.

On the other hand, they have negatively commented on how the University and Students' Union do not make enough effort with communications to Leighton and that they feel events

and services should be offered at Leighton as they are across the other campuses. This is something CSU has reflected upon and is looking to action in order improve the student experience for Leighton Students.

Jack Appleby, CSU Vice President Warrington said, "The feedback from Leighton is really insightful, over the past 2 years I first-hand have witnessed the communication barriers there are between our main sites and Leighton. I value the feedback from Leighton and I can only hope moving forward we can continue to grow the communication barriers between the university and students' union to those studying at the Leighton site. Through continued initiatives such as Union on Tour I can only hope that we can support our students their more and more"

Review

As an Elected Officer team, we have reflected on the whole campaign and where we missed out elements, and how to improve gathering feedback if we were to do something similar again. We felt that if this campaign was to be done again, we would have tried to get around even more of our student groups and tried to engage our Student Council and Student Experience Representatives (SERS) more. We also thought going into more lectures at all sites and liaising with our SERS to facilitate distributing and collecting some physical cards would have enabled a greater pool of feedback. We found the physical cards were fantastic as even when a student was not sure on what to write initially, we found we could engage in deep conversation about student life and then they would discuss their issues and needs with us. Union on Tour is an extremely successful initiative that partnered well with Dear VC. It was a great way for us to reach out to as many sites and give the Vice-Chancellor a well-rounded view of the University of Chester.

Our online campaign was a great way to access hard to reach students as well as cover students we may have missed on our travels through Union on Tour. However, we were disappointed that this method of collecting data was not as well received. It is suggested that in the future, the possibility of asking the University communications to distribute this campaign could have significantly increased our engagement numbers. A thought too late, but one to consider in any future campaign of similar principles.

Recommendations

- Create an action plan to ensure all areas of Dear VC are addressed.
- Every site has access to a welcoming student social space with facilities to heat food, get free boiling water and to sit and chat in a relaxed atmosphere away from University life.
- Inter-campus buses between all sites to better link Marris House and Leighton to Chester/Warrington. Similarly, more frequent buses to link the Chester sites, particularly for disabled students. Introducing a regular bus between Shrewsbury and Chester, like Warrington and Chester will reduce that disconnect that Shrewsbury students feel.
- University owned accommodation to have a complete overhaul where possible, to compete on a local and national scale, to attract more students. This is where students will spend most of their time, so having updated, welcoming accommodation should attract and retain more students. This is more of a need at Warrington.
- Capacity of sports facilities to be investigated further.

- Sustainable travel options for staff and students, rather than building more car parks.
- Installation of Thornton Software on more computers in the Seaborne Library.

Conclusion

To conclude we found the campaign extremely insightful as to what students love and dislike about their current university life. As a Students' Union, we have appreciated the feedback on ourselves and on the University as a whole. We hope that the Vice-Chancellor has found the feedback useful and a great insight into university life within her first few months.

CSU and the University Senior Management team plan to create an action plan based on the feedback from Dear VC, CSU recommendations and universities priorities. This an extremely exciting time for the University and CSU. The CSU Elected Officer team are extremely thankful to Professor Eunice Simmons for listening to how students feel and actioning a plan to continue to improve the student experience.