

Covid-19 – Week Four Check In Survey: Response from the Natural Science programmes

Dear Students

Many thanks to those of you who responded to the week 4 university survey, giving your views on how things are going so far this semester.

About one third of NatSci students who were surveyed replied (81 students) and of those just over 80% agreed or neither agreed or disagreed that they were satisfied with their experience.

Alongside this survey, Gary Mathlin and I also spoke to around 30 Year 3+ students in week 4 to gather their opinions on how things were going.

Before writing to you, I got in touch with the subject departments (B&B, Chemistry, Pharmacology & Physics) to discuss particular issues that were raised by you in the survey and also to find out whether, independent of that, subject departments were planning to take different approaches to aspects of the taught provision.

Putting all of that together, here is a summary of the issues and what we think we can do about them:

Online lectures – generally these were well-received by you. You thought that the majority of lectures were delivered well, and were glad of the flexibility of being able to work through the lectures in your own time. One issue raised was that you didn't always know when lectures would be released each week. Subject departments have asked their staff to try and be consistent here or, failing that, to make clear to students when the lectures would be released each week. This should start in Semester 1.

LOILs – there was a lot of positive comment about LOILs, although students preferred those sessions where activities in addition to Q&A were provided (which, in some cases, resulted in LOILs ending sooner than scheduled). Subject departments are looking at the use and number of LOILs with a view to making them more activity/content based and possibly reducing the number that are scheduled (reducing redundant time). This is likely to start in Semester 1.

IPT – this is the area where most dissatisfaction was expressed. Students would like to have a greater staff presence at IPT, not zoom links into the room and they would like to have some/more lab activity. We are continuing to have discussions with subject departments to improve the offering. Currently there is a commitment from Chemistry to provide NatSci labs for Year 1 and Year 2 students during semester 2; B&B are still working out how to respond to the request for change to IPT from you and also their own students and so is Physics, but there is less concern there. There was also mention of more generic skills activity to take place during IPT for NatSci students and we are looking into how we might facilitate that from NatSci directly. We will discuss this further with the SSLC so if you have any additional ideas, please get in touch with your academic rep. Any changes here will start in Semester 2.

General comments – several students commented on the difficulty of working with three timetables (one for LOILs, one for IPT, one that had to be created by you to watch lecture materials) and also with feeling overloaded with activities and work. Subject departments are asking teaching staff to take a look at what they are providing for students to do each week and, if appropriate, to either reduce that content or make clear what is required and what is optional. I think there was a sense from you that staff were providing more than they would normally but that this was because they were keen to be

helping students rather than simply wanting to make you do more. Next semester we will all be more familiar with how to put together our timetables from the different sources but we will also look into providing some support in getting this done for those of you who would find that helpful.

As well as those who filled in the week 4 survey, I'd like to thank all of you who have kept in touch with us letting us know how you are getting on (both good and not so great). Please do carry on doing that. Finally, a reminder. That although we are back in lockdown, the university remains open so IPT (which can be used as study space at times when there is no staff-led session happening) will continue as will your ability to book and make use of study space on campus and around the city in the Virgil Building and Lewis House.

I hope you find what I have written of some value.

Take care and best wishes

Jane.

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