

Is your Course Value for Money? #FeedbackFortnight

This report is written by the University of Gloucestershire Students' Union and summarises the findings from the Feedback Fortnight that was launched from the 14th to the 27th of March. This Feedback Fortnight was undertaken in collaboration with our Education and Community Officer, Aimee Jones.

This report draws on the data gathered through our online survey which was centred around Value for Money and asked students to reflect on the following question '**Is your course value for money?**'. The aim of the research was to build a clearer picture of what students constituted as Value for Money especially as we move on from Covid-19 with a specific focus on identifying value from their £9,250 fee represented in their course.

Methodology

In order to generate as many responses as possible, we promoted this survey via computer pop-ups, posters, newsletters and through our Course Representatives and Student Subject Coordinators.

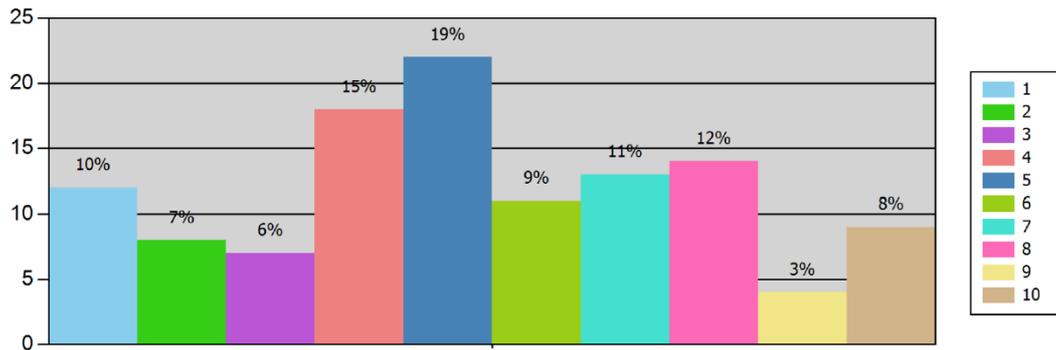
In order to engage students in this Feedback Fortnight, we put price tags around campus which displayed interesting/ thought provoking facts about university value for money with a QR code which linked to the survey.

Voice It was taken over by Feedback Fortnight for two weeks and asked the following questions:

- Do you think your course is value for money? (Rate from 1 being low value for money to 10 being high value for money)
- Please tell us why you gave this score
- Did you know/ expect your course to have additional course costs, and do you know where to see how much they are?
- What would make you feel like your course was better value for money?
- Where should UoG be spending their money regarding academic expenses?

During this two-week period, we had 184 students interact with the survey (an interaction includes navigating their way to the survey or webpage) These interactions covered into **118 completed student responses**.

VM: Do you think your course is value for money?



Response	Count	%
5	22	18.80%
4	18	15.38%
8	14	11.97%
7	13	11.11%
1	12	10.26%
6	11	9.40%
10	9	7.69%
2	8	6.84%
3	7	5.98%
9	4	3.42%

Findings

Do you think your course is value for money? (Rate from 1 being low value for money to 10 being high value for money)

A small snapshot into the findings displays that students are feeling they don't feel like they receive value for money, but it is important to note that 19% surveyed answered five which could suggest a 50/50 feeling towards whether they receive value for money.

38% of students answered 4 or below to “Do you think your Course is Value for Money”?

44% of students answered 6 or above to “Do you think your Course is Value for Money”?

We all gathered a range of data from specific subject communities collecting the most vocal and imputing highest number of responses were:

13% of responses were from the Social Sciences Community

10% of responses were from the Nursing Community

8% of responses were from the Humanities Community

13 % of the respondents who answered 10-6 are students who are in The Business School.

50% of respondents who answered 1-4 were from Humanities, Social Sciences, Technical and Applied Computing and Nursing communities respectively.

The reaction of both Nursing and Humanities as being two vocal communities was expected evidenced in the rest of this report. Social Sciences being the

most vocal indicates how wide-ranging the issue of value for money is for students, affecting more than the previously affected and thus vocal communities.

The option to elaborate on their answers gives an insight into why the majority do not see their course as value for money. These reasons fell into these following categories which will be referred to throughout this report.

- Teaching, course content and lectures
- Additional course costs
- Expectations not met
- Lack of trips/ additional experiences
- After effects of COVID
- Campus facilities
- Questioning the fees themselves

Teaching, Course Content and Lectures

45% of responses who chose to elaborate on their answered mentioned lecturers, teaching and course content. A clear theme was students not experiencing a high quality of teaching which become immediate indicators for students to question their fees worth.

- “Lecture slides are often taken from other universities”- Technical and Applied Computing
- Lecturers “never seem to elaborate or deviate reading off the lecture slides, wouldn’t say its worth as much as I pay”- Social Sciences

Students measure their course quality on teaching, with almost half of participants noting lack of quality of teaching, shows a university wide desire to have more detailed teaching that for students reflects the amount of money they pay, the current teaching they see as not reflective.

“The cost is definitely not reflected in my course. Teaching standards are very low” – Technical and Applied Computing

The quality of teaching was an important issue for the School of Education and Humanities noting: “I feel that the cuts the university have made to the humanities department have had a knock-on effect on which modules are offered and how much support you can get.” As a result, humanities students view their course as less valuable due to the decrease in modules and teaching provided by the university.

This view of their course costs not being reflective in the quality of teaching has a detrimental effect on the effort students apply.

- “It is understaffed and students are made to feel unwanted and undervalued by the university. The course is underfunded, and it feels like they don’t want to run it anymore” – Humanities

Communication was a distinct subtopic in the theme of teaching, having poor or lack of communication often creating a detrimental view of their course for students:

- “We pay an enormous amount every year for poor communication lack of support during stressful times and inability to contact personal tutors the way they are intended” - Nursing

“I don’t feel much of an obligation to attend anymore due to the general lack of effort put in by lecturers”- Technical and Applied Computing

- “There’s an outright war among lecturers, little to no communication and everything is last minute” - Nursing

Additional course costs

The second topic elaborated on was additional course costs. This is especially prevalent for School of Art courses who pay for materials that they must have to complete their course:

- “We also have to pay so much extra in our course in prints, books, films for cameras, presentation boxes in high quality etc” – Photography
- “For an art course I expected more materials to be provided at the very least paper or even sketchbooks” - Art

Expectations not met

Students felt low value for money due to feeling ‘mis sold’ their course, with the reality not meeting what was offered at open days or induction talks.

- “The promise of training and placements at my local hospital were lies” - Nursing
- “I’ve signed up for a course that doesn’t actually exist”- Strategy, Enterprise Leadership & Mgmt

“Absolutely not what was advertised to me online, at open days and at the start of terms... my second year has left me disappointed, disinterested, with a chronic lack of motivation for my studies” – Social Sciences

This feeling is mis sold extends to the lack of additional trips or experiences many were expecting to have included in their course to support and expand their education. Thus, value for money is seen as less due to the lack of course expansion as it remained within the confines of online or their classroom.

- “I think it would be good to have more exciting field trips/ additional content to support engagement in the school”- Education
- “There have been no trips or extra use of my course fees. Just lectures”- Technical & Applied Computing

Covid

These expected course experiences have been affected by covid, creating a feeling of getting less for your money.

- “During the pandemic it was not worth £9250 due to being online for a whole year affected the learning”- Social Sciences
- “The fact we are held to the same standard and are required to spend the same amount of money on this course as the years that were not affected by the pandemic is unfair and is not acceptable”- Technical & Applied Computing

However, is it important to highlight that some students note:

- “It feels like Covid have come an excuse for everything, yet restrictions have been lifted and we’ve had no outside talks from people in the field” – humanities

Therefore, although the mention of Covid and its effects disrupting students’ experiences it should not be a blanket explanation for all students’ concerns over value for money which this report aims to highlight.

Campus Facilities

There is also a feeling of low value for money due to the campus facilities furthering the feeling of getting less for your money.

- “I would like to see better facilities for casual study”- Education
- “The lack of equipment/ facilities within the campus is poor” - Nursing
- “My clinical skills session were VERY poorly equipped. Not enough of the equipment needed to properly practice anything individually” - Nursing

“Lecturers actually teaching with their experience rather than just reading from a PowerPoint” – Marketing, Events, Hosp. & Tourism

Lastly there is a questioning of the £9250 itself,

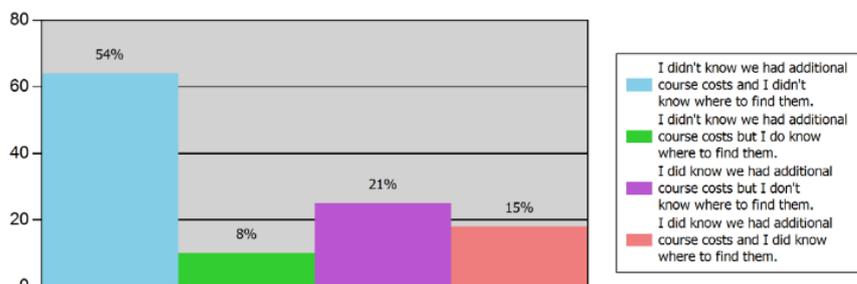
- “I would be interested where the fees actually go as most things require us to fund ourselves” -Film & TV

As a result, students are not feeling like their course is value for money as they are not seeing where their fees are invested in.

“Not exactly sure what we’re paying for most of the time”- Psychological Sciences

Did you know/ expect your course to have additional course costs, and do you know where to see how much they are?

With students not seeing where their fees are invested in mind the second question asked was **Did you know/ expect your course to have additional course costs, and do you know where to see how much they are?**



Response	Count	%
I didn't know we had additional course costs and I didn't know where to find them.	64	54.70%
I did know we had additional course costs but I don't know where to find them.	25	21.37%
I did know we had additional course costs and I did know where to find them.	18	15.38%
I didn't know we had additional course costs but I do know where to find them.	10	8.55%

55% of responses did not know where and also that they had additional course costs.

This lack of knowledge in course costs and where to find them is a factor in how low students view their courses as value for money. It also speaks to the wider lack of communication many students have felt in terms of value for money and do not know where their fees are invested.

It was shown through this that 21% students did not know where to find additional course costs even if they did know they had them, totalling 75% of students who answered did not know where to find course costs.

The next question asked: **What would make you feel like your course was better value for money?**

Teaching and Course Content

53% of respondents mentioned teaching and course content many replies focusing on improving lecturers and course content to improve students' view of their course's value for money.

- “More of a hands-on approach to learning”- Architecture, Const. & Env
- “Double the contact time”- Psychological Sciences
- “Better communication from faculty”- Nursing
- “More lectures” - Architecture, Const. & Env
- “Ensuring the module content, and the quality of its delivery is key. I think that’s the heart of education”- Strategy, Enterprise Leadership & Mgmt.

This furthers the evidence there is a desire from students to have better quality of teaching and more contact time which becomes an immediate reflective of their fees.

Added Value Experiences

16% of answers mentioned adding trips to increase the feeling of value for money in your course.

- “Decrease prices of optional trips”-Art
- “More experiences and trips”- Marketing, Events, Hosp. & Tourism
- “Trips, free content e.g., summer reading” – Humanities
- “Added value trips which we didn’t have to pay for” - Strategy, Enterprise Leadership & Mgmt.

The desire to have trips was increased often due to the ‘making up’ from covid

- “I think the ability to go on trips that were cancelled due to covid would make me much happier and satisfied that the course was good value for money. As a cohort we even said that we would be happy for these to be in our own time if need be.”- Social Sciences

Extra Course Costs

We know from our tool Change It, where 62 students have up-voted on the issue of removing re-submission fees it is an important a prominent issue for students. Especially for the School of Health and Social Care as students note they are having to pay resubmission fees often as a result to not being used to assignments: “For a lot of people, this is their first time writing at L4”. – Nursing

“The cohort was told we would have an opportunity for re-submission on assignments. There was absolutely no mention of the high cost involved in doing so”- Nursing

There is note of the lack of communication around the resubmission fees not knowing they were an additional course cost which adds to the feeling of being ‘mis sold’.

- “Firstly, not having to pay resit assignments. I have not had to do this as of yet, but I think this is extremely unfair considering the amount of money we pay to enrol”- Psychological Sciences

The final question asked was “Where should UoG be spending their money regarding academic expenses?”

Facilities

42% of respondents noted improvement in facilities would improve their academic experience it shows the importance facilities have and how they can have a knock-on effect to their own academic experience.

- “FCH have removed over 100 computers with those new architecture spaces, felt that has disadvantaged hundreds of people, for a few students gains”-Social Sciences
- “Students need more access to eBooks as there is not a good range through the online library”- Social Sciences
- “Ensuring the library is relevant and up to date for all courses”- Environmental Sciences

Investment in Lecturers

Respondents mentioned the importance of investing in their lecturers to improve academic experience

- “Please invest more in lecturers”- Education
- “Giving staff a proper cost of living increase and pension”- Technical & Applied Computing
- “Offer higher salaries to lecturers to encourage better ones to join the university or offer more training to those already here”- Technical & Applied Computing

Students say this investment would advance the curriculum as

- “I think the curriculum needs to be updated and made more modern and money should be spent on that, the course also feels very understaffed”- Film & TV

Additional Course Costs

A strong theme throughout this report has been additional course costs. Indicating the rise of the cost of living, students are struggling to balance multiple pressures on their finances. Additional course costs as previously mentioned is an important course cost for School of Arts, instead of being optional extras are incurred as they are paying for the material required for them by UoG.

- “PRINTERS, the fact I’m on an art course and pay for 20p per sheet for a terrible quality print is embarrassing. I’d assume more budget for lecturers if it works that way as we’ve had 4 or 5 terrible ones over 3 years”- Photography
- “Art supplies and field trips”- Architecture, Const. & Env.

School of Health and Social Care also note the heavy cost of additional course costs in resist fees.

- “No resist fees!!!!”- Social Work & Social Care

Recommendations

To conclude this report, we have aimed to draw together some recommendations.

1. Many students noted their view of course value has decreased because of covid and the reduction external educational advancement.

Therefore, the university should aim to increase the number of trips, crucially ensuring they are at a limited extra cost to students.

2. Remove the resubmission fees. Due to the current climate of the rise of the cost of living, the use of resubmission fees often by students not used to writing at this level. These issues are increasingly prevalent to students which this report has aimed to highlight.
3. Better communication on where fees are spent to students and advertise their location clearly.
4. Reduce additional course costs for certain courses where they are incurred for expected materials such as School of Arts.
5. As one of the key topics was quality of teaching, have the university invest in the teaching of the university through training, help with public speaking and course design to prevent lecturers from simply reading from slides.
6. As this is a complicated topic, we understand we could not discuss all aspects or nuances associated with this, but we hope this report begins consistent conversations on this topic. Therefore, our final recommendation is a call for university to look more into this topic and make positive changes that benefit students to improve their feeling of value for money across UoG.