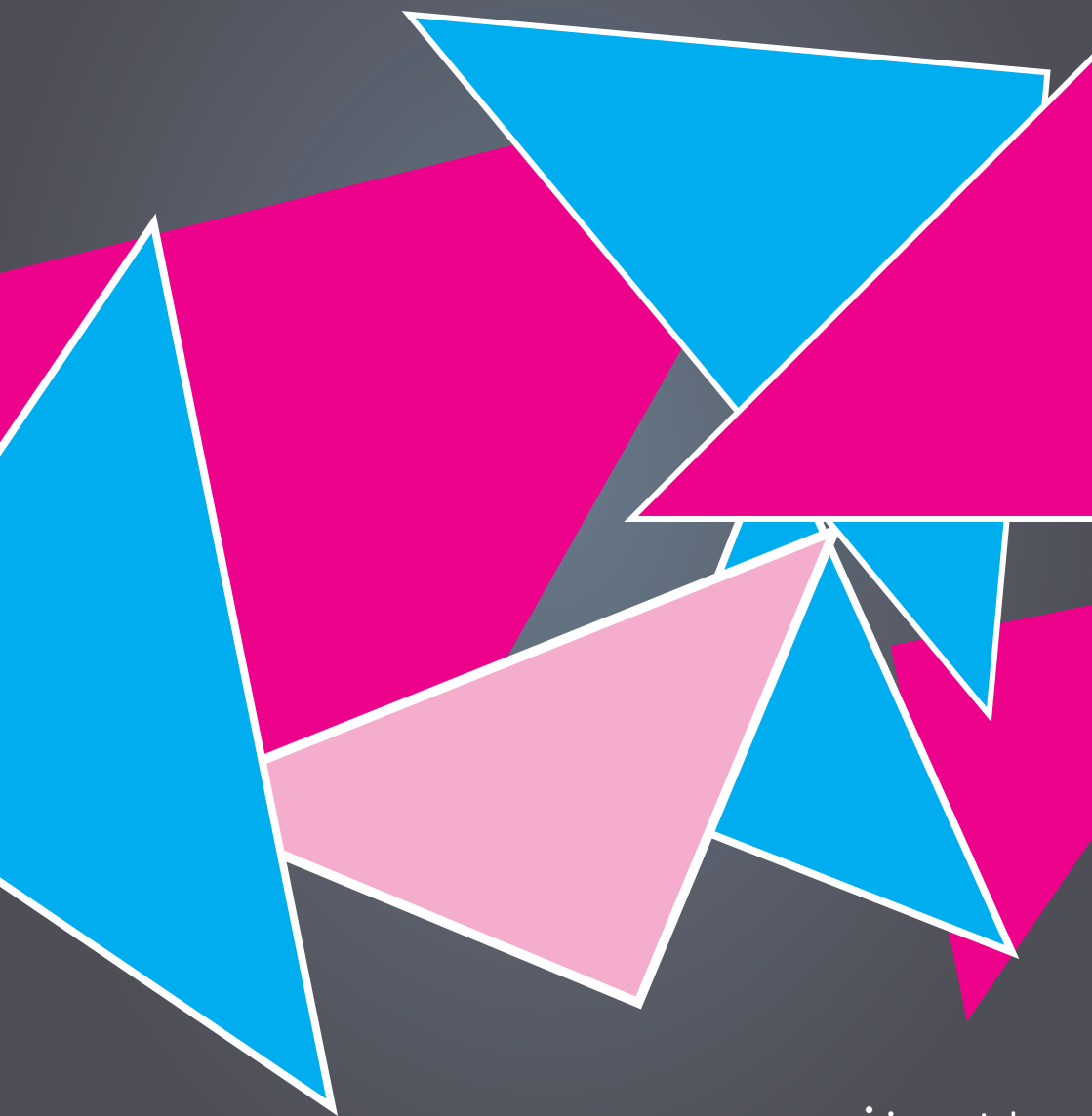


PTES Response

2016





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imperialcollegeunion.org/responses



All information correct
at the time of going to
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Introduction

Imperial College Union has long welcomed its crucial role in amplifying and directing the student voice to the highest levels of debate at Imperial College London. To this end, we have established a continuing dialogue with College, faculties and departments, using our responses to national surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) as drivers for change. These responses have been shaped by the Academic Representation Network, ensuring that the opinions of our members are heard loudly and clearly at all levels throughout College.

Last year in 2015, Imperial College Union presented its response to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). This year we are excited to present our response to its partner survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) in collaboration with the Graduate Students' Union (GSU). Though it is reassuring to see that there has been an increase in satisfaction rates across most categories, we acknowledge that there are still many areas of dissatisfaction that need to be addressed if College is to maintain its position as a world-leading university.

Several areas of concern arose in the preparation of this document. Feedback remains a pressing issue that comes up year after year, in both the NSS and the PTES. In the results of this year's PTES, there are still an astonishing 40% of Postgraduate Taught students who are dissatisfied with the quality of feedback they



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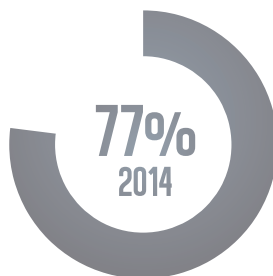
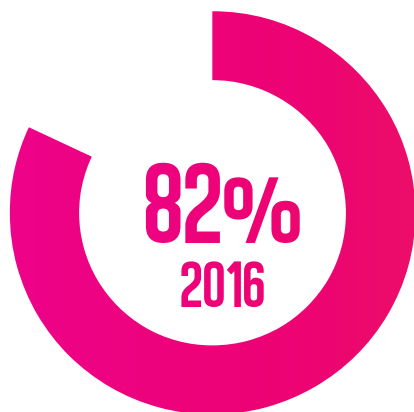
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are receiving. Students mentioned on multiple occasions that the timeliness and usefulness of feedback was inconsistent across the board, inevitably hindering their wider development. Following that same strand of thought, there was also a desire reflected within the student comments for a curriculum that allowed them to reflect on their learning throughout their programme. The lack thereof has proven to be detrimental to their personal, professional and academic progression. There is also a sense that students feel limited in their ability to provide constructive feedback regarding their courses to their departments by being limited to responding to surveys and interacting with their Academic Reps; a concern that was raised in the 2014 PTES Response and one which we now hope to address and rectify.

Imperial College London is an excellent research and educational institution which is home to some of the best Postgraduate Taught courses in the world. Its mission is

centred around developing the next generation of scientists and engineers who will go on to have a wide reaching impact on the world around them. Imperial attracts some of the best minds and must ensure that it responds to the feedback gathered in the PTES survey if it wishes to remain world-class and in touch with the ever-changing needs of students and the working world. Imperial College Union hopes that the recommendations put forward in this response initiate meaningful and long lasting change within College.


Teaching



The level of support that Postgraduate Taught students receive is vital to their educational experience during their time at Imperial College. A significant aspect of the support structures in place are Personal Tutors. Whilst the personal tutoring system has its basis in a primarily Undergraduate setting, Imperial College Union feels that there is the scope and need to strengthen the Personal Tutor system provision for Postgraduate Taught students. Not only will this provide PGT students with the academic and welfare support they need to thrive at Imperial, but also will foster a greater sense of community amongst Postgraduate students.

Recommendation

For College to review the personal tutoring policy especially in relation to Postgraduate Taught students, looking particularly at ways to support these students on a more personalised basis.



As part of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, Imperial College London are looking to work in partnership with students in order to facilitate educational change and improvement. As students with a wide variety of prior educational knowledge, Postgraduate Taught students are well placed to offer their experience in improving the teaching quality received by their peers. Departments should therefore create opportunities for Postgraduate Taught students to work with academic staff in reviewing the course curriculum, particularly through collaborations with elected Academic Reps.

Recommendation

For Departments to regularly consult with and involve Postgraduate Taught students in annual curriculum reviews, in collaboration with the Academic Representation Network.



Most of the teaching on this course has been far superior to what I experienced during my undergrad.



Whilst the contact hours are sufficient, the quality of teaching is not and the explanation of material is generally poor.

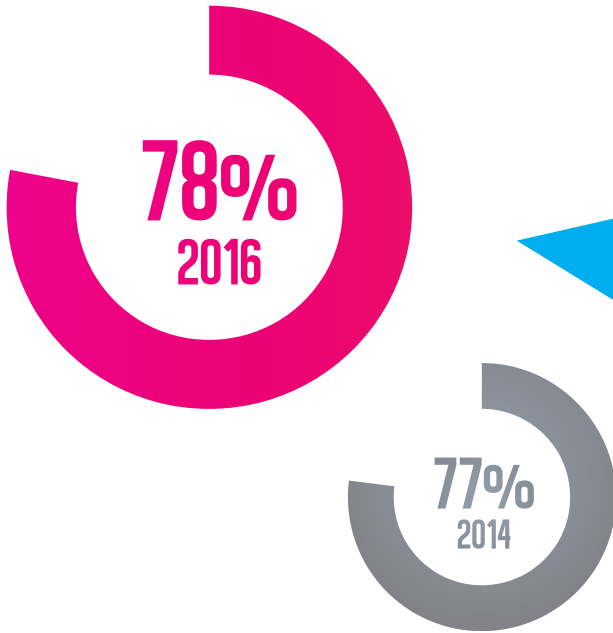


Large variation in the abilities of lecturers to teach student.



Postdoctoral supervision on the course is particularly strong.

Engagement



As learning and teaching begins to move away from some of the more 'traditional' teaching methods encompassing passively-received lectures with limited scope for student engagement, there is now a greater argument for active, peer based style learning. There is also increasing evidence to suggest that peer-to-peer contact better equips students with invaluable collaborative skills that will aid them in the workplace as they emerge as graduates.

Recommendation

Programmes should look at embedding more peer-to-peer contact within the curriculum by introducing smaller group sessions. This would allow students to discuss the material in depth with their peers.

Ultimately, the purpose of higher education is to develop and enhance individuals, enabling students to change the world around them. However, with ever-increasing workloads, students are rarely given the opportunity to apply their knowledge outside of the classroom. Curricula should therefore encourage the application of practical theory and be geared towards training students to use technical knowledge in meaningful contexts, including research, societal projects and enterprise.

Recommendation

College should encourage Master's courses to go beyond the classroom by integrating practical applications of course content within the context of wider societal challenges.



No group or one-to-one tuition, just lectures with the entire year group. Not much opportunity to ask questions etc.



Whilst we are given the opportunity to discuss our opinions we are quickly told we are wrong and they are right.

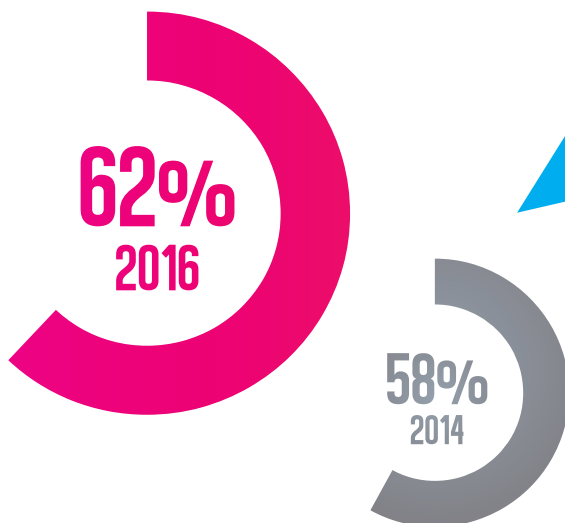


There has been no formal way for students to be able to discuss their experiences. I think this is important because it helps encourage communication between researchers which will no doubt be important in the future.



Encouraged to ask questions but I feel directed reading on topics would have been much more beneficial in this regard. I.e "Read ch6 of this book for next week/read this paper on this topic.

Assessment & Feedback



Within the student comments, it was clear that there was a concern that deadlines were distributed unevenly throughout the year. This, combined with delayed feedback, meant that students were unable to improve the quality of their work, as they are not given the opportunity to build upon their previous body of work. In order to rectify this, departments should look to develop an assessment matrix outlining when deadlines are for each piece of assessed work.

Recommendation

For College to review the distribution of deadlines across Postgraduate Taught programs by developing an assessment matrix which will allow both students and staff to anticipate busier periods.

Good quality feedback is a core aspect of an individual's learning process; it allows us to review our mistakes and build upon them, to improve our work for the better. However, it would appear that in the debate between timeliness and quality feedback, the true purpose of feedback has been lost. To this end, College should look to open a dialogue around the purpose of feedback, and in doing so, improve the quality of feedback that students receive.

Recommendation

For College to create a deeper understanding of the true purpose of feedback as a key component to a student's learning. A core aspect of this is ensuring that every student receives detailed feedback to aid in their learning and development.



In a course, we had to submit two courseworks, one 40% and the other 60% of our mark. After submitting the first one, we never had feedback, or solutions, just to know whether or not we were in the right directions.



So far we have only received individual feedback once, and mine was two sentences long.

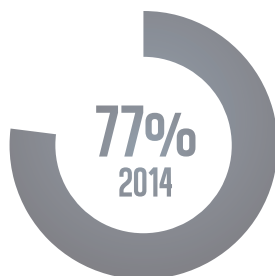


Feedback has been consistently late, or never arrived at all (despite us being told it was available). Course Rep followed this up but received no reply.



Feedback has been consistently late, or never arrived at all (despite us being told it was available). Course Rep followed this up but received no reply.

Dissertation or Major Project



Many students reported that the amount of supervision they received during their work on their MSc project was not sufficient enough to aid research and development, and that they were not offered enough support. In some cases, the supervisors were not available for meetings or for guidance, leaving many students in the dark when it came to completing their dissertations or projects.

Recommendation

College should work with faculties & departments to produce and publish a set of minimum standards for supervision.

Many students expressed a concern that their supervisors were not always available for questions; this inevitably caused a delay in their project and was detrimental to the quality of work that was produced. Establishing a joint set of expectations between students and their supervisors around the frequency of contact and the maximum time between enquiry and answer. This would ensure that students progress well and continuously in their projects, and foster a positive working relationship between the supervisor and supervisee on a more individual basis.

Recommendation

Encourage all supervisors to work alongside their supervisees to create a set of expectations regarding supervision.



I don't think the expectations of my project were made clear, and my viva examiner said that I made the same error with my report and viva as past students who had conducted similar projects.



When working in groups, group allocations have sometimes left me working with the same classmates on a number of occasions, this can be good and bad.

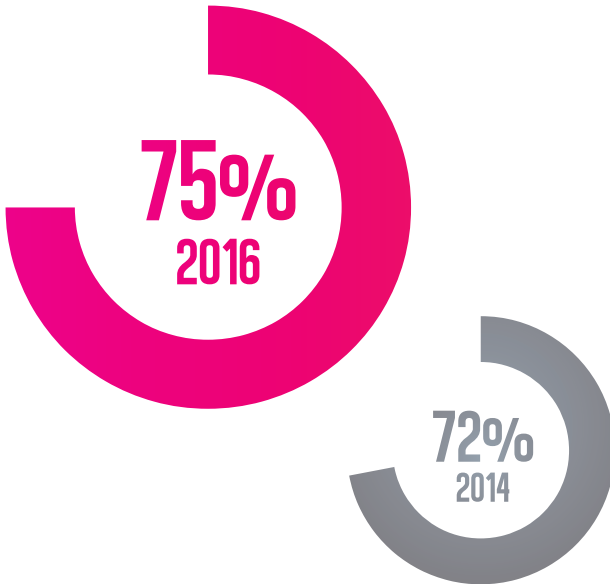


More detailed marking for 'Results' sections of mini projects would have been useful, specifically regarding tables/figures.



Coursework during our first term appeared to be inconsistently marked by different tutors. Optional course work had no clear criteria for marking.

Organisation & Management



Imperial College London is home to one of the most diverse student bodies in the UK. Our Postgraduate Taught courses attract students of all ages and backgrounds. This being said, there was a clear desire for departments to take external commitments into account when making any sudden timetabling changes, particularly in the case for mature, part time or student parents.

Recommendation

Where there are last minute changes or cancellations to the timetable, ensure that these are communicated to students in good time, so that they are able to plan their time accordingly.

An individual's personal development is not just limited to learning within the classroom; however, with increasing workloads, students are unable to engage with their curriculum in a constructive and meaningful way. Students should be given the opportunity to develop beyond the lecture theatre, allowing time of non-academic personal development.

Recommendation

Ensure that courses are timetabled to allow students to take a break from teaching and reflect on their academic performance.



The workload is generally very demanding (although I expected this), however coursework deadlines could have been spaced out more throughout the year.



Quite often there are periods with little work and then periods of a lot of work at once. Could be organised a little better.

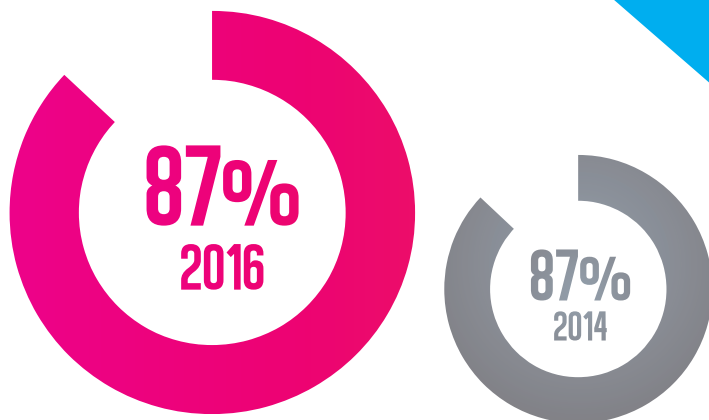


We were pushed to our absolute limit in terms of work ethic. There was insufficient time allocated throughout the course for private study.



It has been hard work, however this is something that they said that we should expect. It has been a great experience and I have learned more time management.

Resources & Services



Resources and services is the one area in this survey which didn't increase compared to last year. With evident challenges around space and resource, Imperial must continue to innovate in the way that it uses space to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. Any renovations should aim to strike the balance between providing communal space, flexible teaching space and digital learning resources. Future renovation plans should also address the lack of computers reported by students in certain departments.

Recommendation

Ensure that College continues to support and develop the work around space sharing, particularly with regards to the effective use of space across College.



There are still problems with the availability of course material on Blackboard. Particularly generic course material for group projects, timetables etc.

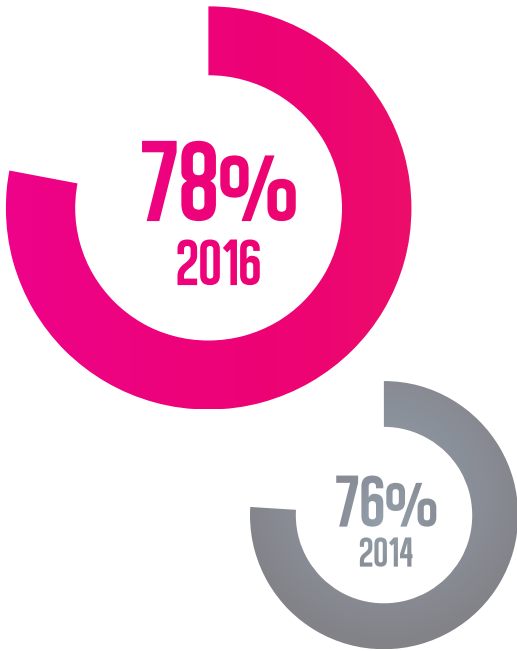


The course needed to be more organised and more interactive with learning.



The 'rapid feedback sessions' which I imagine is supposed to warrant the lack of tutorials has in my experience been run by unmotivated PhD students who mainly rest on the participating students teaching each other.

Skills Development



Many students reported a lack of opportunity to be able to reflect on the skills they have acquired throughout their course, more specifically reflecting on their ability to apply these skills to research and to continued study. Despite having had the opportunity to develop such skills in many instances, students expressed a lack of confidence in using these skills in other academic contexts. To ensure that students feel properly equipped to embark on further study and research, there should be greater space in the curriculum for reflection.

Recommendation

Ensure that through taught programmes, Postgraduate Taught students are adequately prepared for a smooth transition into further research opportunities.

Attracting a cohort of outstanding students that are academically driven is second nature to Imperial College. However, these students are naturally very concerned with the grades they acquire and it is the responsibility of the course to divert the students' focus toward skills development rather than purely academic achievement in the interest of developing employable, well-equipped graduates. Students should be taught and educated in such a way that encourages skills development.

Recommendation

College should strive towards a skills based curriculum, which addresses the needs of both students and the current Graduate job market.



Nearly every course should [have assessed work] to encourage students to come to class as I am aware of a number of students who sat exams without having attended even one lecture of that module.



It is as if the course was designed to create the most stressful situation possible for students.



Very little opportunity to mingle with the other students on my course.



I would have really preferred to receive the number grade from my core course (as opposed to only receiving the letter grade).

Vital Statistics

Imperial College Union are proud to present this table of recommendations as part of our response to the 2016 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).

Whilst developing our recommendations, there was the sense that although students acknowledge that they are members of a world-class teaching institution at Imperial College London, there is a clear desire reflected in student comments for a culture that values development beyond the classroom.

It is crucial that Imperial students are not only educated to the highest of standards, but also that they are encouraged to think critically beyond their own discipline for the benefit of society.

Please see the below table which puts forward our recommendations to College. We look forward to working closely with College to see these recommendations put into action.

Metric	2014 score (%)	2016 score (%)	Best Practice	Imperial College Union Recommendations
Overall	80	82	NHLI, CLCC, ESE, Aeronautics, Surgery/Cancer, Chemistry, Mech Eng	
Teaching <i>(Staff are good and explaining things, Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching, The course is intellectually stimulating, The course has enhanced my academic ability, The learning material provided on my course are useful, There is sufficient contact time, I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course)</i>	77	82	Mech Eng, NHLI, CEP	1) For College to review the personal tutoring policy especially in relation to Postgraduate Taught students, looking particularly at ways to support Postgraduate Taught students on a more personalised basis. 2) For Departments to regularly consult with and involve Postgraduate Taught students in annual curriculum reviews in collaboration with the Academic Representation Network.
Engagement <i>(I am encouraged to ask questions or make contributions in taught sessions, The course has created sufficient opportunities to discuss my work with other students, My course has challenged me to produce my best work, The workload on my course has been manageable, I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience)</i>	77	78	NHLI, CLCC, Chemistry	3) Programmes should look at embedding more peer to peer contact within the curriculum by introducing smaller group sessions. This would allow students to discuss the material in depth with their peers. 4) College should encourage Master's courses to go beyond the classroom by integrating practical applications of course content within the context of wider societal challenges.

Metric	2014 score (%)	2016 score (%)	Best Practice	Imperial College Union Recommendations
Assessment and Feedback <i>(The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance, Assessment arrangements and markings have been fair, Feedback on my work has been useful)</i>	58	62	CLCC, Mech Eng, EEE	<p>5) For College to review the distribution of deadlines across Postgraduate taught programmes by developing an assessment matrix which will allow both students and staff to anticipate busier periods.</p> <p>6) For College to create a deeper understanding of the true purpose of feedback as a key component to a student's learning. A core aspect of this is ensuring that every student receives detailed feedback to aid in their learning and development.</p>
Dissertation or Major Project <i>(I understand the required standards for the dissertation / major project, I am happy with the support I received for planning my dissertation/major project, My Supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my dissertation / major project, My supervisor provides helpful feedback on my progress)</i>	77	80	CLCC, Chemistry, Physics	<p>7) College should work with faculty & departments to produce and publish a set of minimum standards for supervision.</p> <p>8) Encourage all supervisors to work alongside their supervisees to create a set of expectations regarding supervision.</p>
Organisation and Management <i>(The timetables fit wells with my other commitments, Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively, The course is well organised and is running smoothly, I was given appropriate guidance and support when I started my course, I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run)</i>	72	75	CLCC, Mech Eng, EEE	<p>9) Where there are last minute changes or cancellations to the timetable, ensure that these are communicated to students in good time, so that they are able to plan their time accordingly.</p> <p>10) Ensure that courses are timetabled to allow students to take a break from teaching and reflect on their academic performance.</p>
Resources and Services <i>(The library resources and services are good enough for my needs, I have been able to access general IT resources..., I have been able to access subject specific resources, I am aware of how to access the support services at my institution)</i>	87	87	NHLI, EEE, Maths	<p>11) Ensure that College continues to support and develop the work around space sharing, particularly with regards to the effective use of space across College.</p>
Skills Development <i>(As a result of the course I am more confident about independent learning, My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed, My research skills have developed during my course, My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my course, I have been encouraged to think about what skills I need to develop for my career, As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career)</i>	76	78	NHLI, Mech Eng, EEE	<p>12) Ensure that through taught programmes, Postgraduate Taught students are adequately prepared for a smooth transition into further research opportunities.</p> <p>13) College strive towards a skills based curriculum, which addresses the needs of both students and the current Graduate job market.</p>

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