

Edge Hill University Students' Union

**Reputation and student experience
research**

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This report contains the insight from the 4 stage research project conducted by NUS Insight on behalf of Edge Hill Students' Union. The aim of this report is to provide Edge Hill Students' Union with feedback about their reputation and the student experience.

Students at Edge Hill are generally positive about their time at Edge Hill University (EHU); they are satisfied with their university experience so far and appreciate the atmosphere, environment and safety the campus offers. However, finances and money matters are a prominent feature in the thoughts of students at Edge Hill, with these issues cited as a potential for dropping out of university alongside physical and mental health matters.

While student satisfaction with the Students' Union is generally high, there is evidence that the Students' Union is not engaging across the entire student population. Pragmatically, the Students' Union can't be something for everyone, however there are a number of opportunities for the Students' Union to increase its relevance and reach across all student demographics and ensure they are inclusive to all.

Students believe the role of Edge Hill Students' Union is to be supportive, the voice of students and to be a place to go for social events and well-being services. Students recognise the importance of the membership services but mainly use the commercial offerings such as the SU shop and SU bar.

It has been recognised that the communications both internally and externally need to be improved. Students and institution stakeholders aren't fully aware of the Students' Union services and facilities they provide, and there is a lack of awareness as to who the elected officers are and what they do. Improving the communication should improve the reputation and student experience at Edge Hill Students' Union.

Institution stakeholders are overall positive about the SU, recognising the journey they have been on and what the team have achieved so far. Many emphasise their own willingness to be more involved and speak of their open door policy to encourage open communications between the SU staff and officers with the University team. Their overall feedback is to focus on the basics and getting them right, rather than concentrating on ambitions for larger city based unions. They think the main areas to get right are supporting and representing students and they place a high importance on getting the communications right.

SU staff recognised the importance of the SU through offering students advice, support, events and representation, they described EHSU to be developing, supportive and helpful. Many highlighted issues around the communications and appreciated the need for an online presence focusing on social media. The majority felt that the decision making for EHSU should come from the elected officers and students, with the support from senior members of staff to utilise their experience and knowledge. SU staff believe that there should be a focus around development and increase interaction with students by talking to them more.

About the research

About the research

Objectives

This research was commissioned by Edge Hill Students' Union (EHSU) to give them an insight into perceptions of EHSU, their communications and Edge Hill student's experience to inform strategic direction.

The three overarching objectives for the research are:

- ↳ To understand more about the Students' Union (SU) reputation, both with stakeholders at the institution and SU, as well as with current students
- ↳ To understand how to improve the SU offering from a student's point of view: what are their needs, their aspirations and how do they want to see EHSU grow?
- ↳ To understand the requirement and preferences for student communications and any improvements to these

Methodology

This research consisted of 4 stages:

- Institution stakeholder interviews
- SU staff online survey
- Student focus groups
- Student online survey

The results from the 4 stages have been compiled to form this report.

Institution stakeholder interviews

Tele-depth interviews were conducted with 13 institution stakeholders from EHU. EHSU provided NUS Insight with the contact details of 17 institution stakeholders who were senior members of the leadership team. The 17 institution stakeholders were listed in order of priority of whom EHSU considered to be important to contact. During the tele-depth interviews a semi-structured discussion guide was used to format the structure of the interviews. The tele-depth interviews were pre-arranged phone calls and lasted approximately 30-45 mins.

SU staff survey

EHSU provided NUS Insight with the contact details of 80 current members of SU staff. Email invitations containing the link to the online survey were sent by NUS Insight to the 80 current staff members, alongside prompting communications from the senior leaders of EHSU. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and was in field from 3rd October to 18th January 2017. 22 SU staff members completed the survey.

Student focus groups

Two face to face groups were held at EHSU on the 27th October 2016 and an online focus group took place on 25th October. EH students were contacted via EHSU and asked to complete the focus group application form if they wished to take part in the focus groups. Respondents were categorised into year of study and were chosen at random. NUS Insight ensured that all demographics were covered within the focus group to ensure a range of viewpoints were heard.

Student online survey

A total sample of 507 responses was gathered in an online survey, carried out between 14th November and 18th January 2017. The survey was promoted by EHSU and NUS Insight via email to the NUS Extra database and social media.

The sample of respondents achieved in the online survey reflected a range of student types, ages and course levels across the University. Just over three quarters of respondents were aged between 18 and 22 (76%) and the majority were undertaking their undergraduate degree (88%). Full time respondents accounted for the vast make-up of the sample (93%), while the gender split reflects the EH student body, with 71% females taking part and 27% males having their say.

5% of the respondents indicated they were international students studying within the UK, while the majority identified as white British (87%).

Just under a third (31%) live in a privately rented house or flat that is shared. A fourth (20%) live at home with their parents and a quarter live in halls of residence (24%). 23% of the sample indicated they had a disability, impairment or long term health condition.

Reading this report

The full findings are detailed in specific named sections; however, they are often preceded by a section summary including context presented in this bold text.

The report presents the findings from all 4 methodologies; the two quantitative online surveys, the qualitative focus groups and the tele-depth interviews. Figures clearly indicate which stage of the research findings they are demonstrating.

Student online survey

The survey sample accounts for 3% of the overall student population at the University, which was estimated to be 15,539. This sample is accurate to a 95% confidence level* and with a 5% margin of error**. This allows for a robust analysis of the sample, considering the complex make-up of the student body and ensuring valid representation.

Significant differences

A number of questions from the student online survey have been broken down and compared with each other according to key demographics.

Where there are any statistical significant differences between answers with a large enough base size ($n > 30$) and are valid at a confidence level of between 95% and 99%, they are reported. Where there are significant differences across demographics and segments, they are highlighted clearly.

*The confidence level tells you how sure you can be about the accuracy of the responses. It is expressed as a percentage and represents how often the true percentage of the population who would pick an answer lies within the confidence interval. The 95% confidence level means you can be 95% certain.

**The confidence interval (also called margin of error) is the plus-or-minus figure that we can be certain of the reliability of responses. With a confidence interval of 5% should 50% percent of the sample select an answer you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 45% ($50-5$) and 55% ($50+5$) would have picked that answer.

Staff online survey

Staff at EHSU were asked to complete an online survey. 22 respondents completed the online survey fully and as such it is important to note that because of the small base size, the results may not be representative of the total staff population and should, therefore, be treated as being indicative rather than conclusive.

Research findings

Research findings

1.0 Getting to know your students

In order to gain an in-depth understanding about the student body at EHU which can be useful for framing student-facing communication strategies and activities, this section looks at why students chose to study at EHU, what's on their minds and why they do/ do not feel like a 'typical' student.

Findings showed that students at EH enjoy chilling out at home with their housemates, friends and family and participate in leisure time activities such as watching films and TV. Money and finances tend to be top of mind, followed by exams/coursework and looking for future employment. For those who do feel like a typical student, reasons were because they study and they go out/socialise. Of those who don't feel like a typical student this is generally because they are mature students or they don't go out much.

The majority of students at EH are satisfied with their experience at university and just 5% are dissatisfied.

Student identity - Typical student

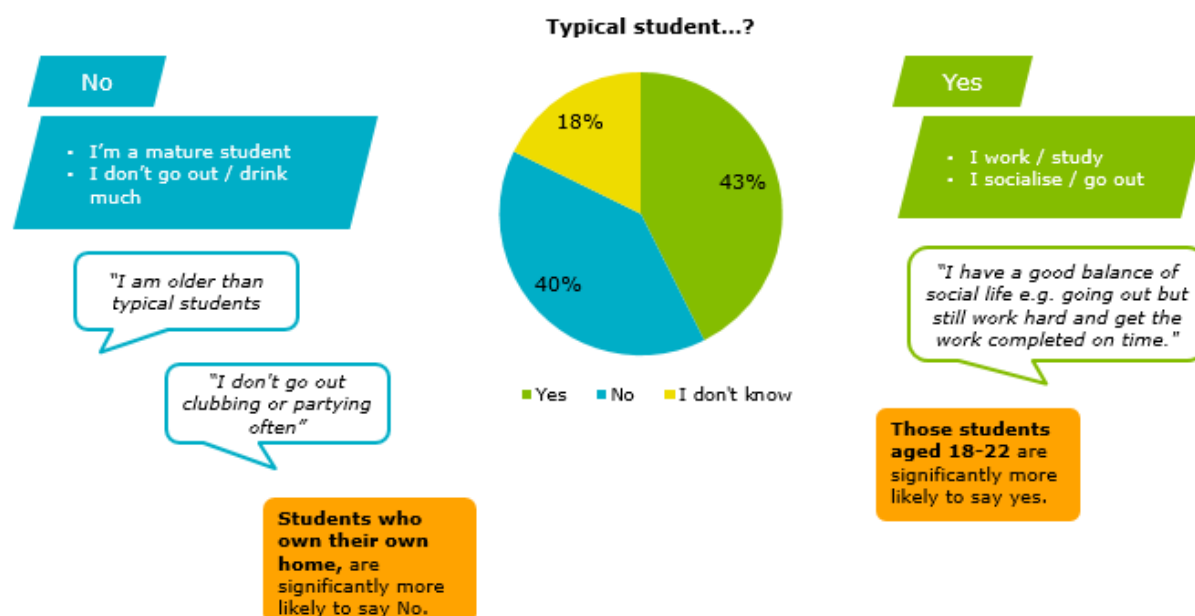
When asked if they felt like a 'typical' student there was a clear split amongst EH students, with 43% saying yes, 40% saying no and the other 18% saying 'I don't know'.

Younger students (aged 18-22) were more likely to say they feel like a 'typical' student giving reasons based around their lifestyle – they work/study hard, whilst also socialising and having fun. Focus group respondents also stated that a 'typical' student is someone who lives on campus away from home; they have debt and eat lots of takeaways. Conversely those who said they didn't feel like a 'typical' student, were more likely to say this if they are older and own their own home.

In addition to this, those who said they do not feel like a 'typical' student stated it was because they don't go out or drink a lot, they tend to be mature students and do not align to TV/media stereotypes of students. Again, they are defining a student by their lifestyle and social factors.

This student mix highlights the diversity of the student body and their requirements, emphasising the challenge for EHSU to provide a range of services and facilities that cater for the variety of student needs.

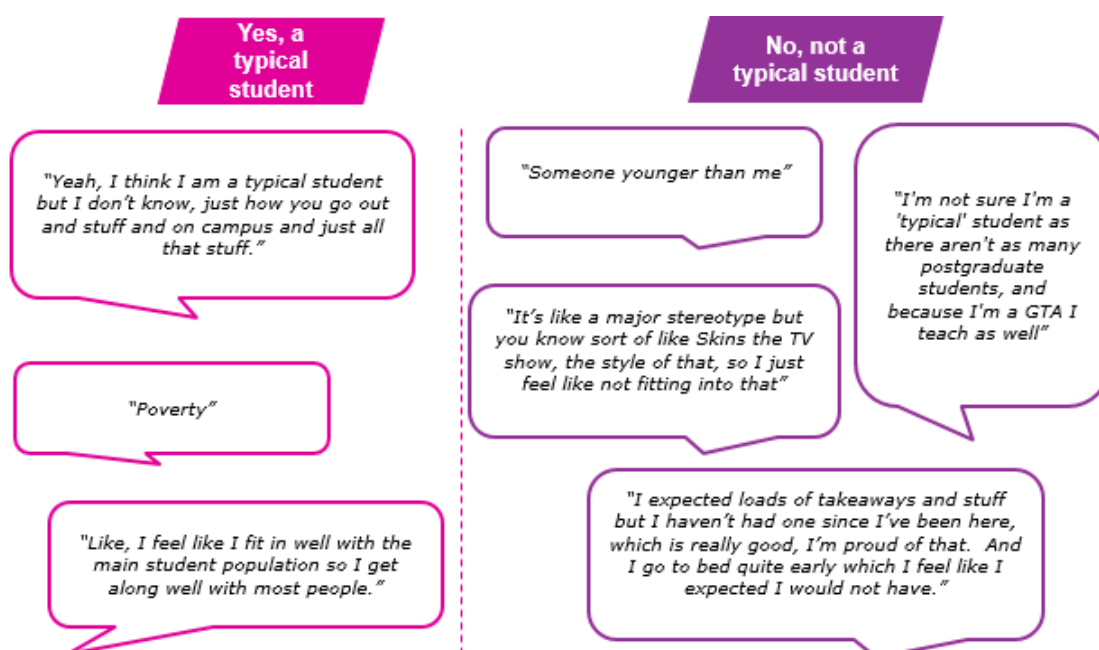
Figure 1: Student survey. Typical students



Base: 507 respondents.

C1 Do you consider yourself to be a typical student?

Figure 2: Focus group. Typical students

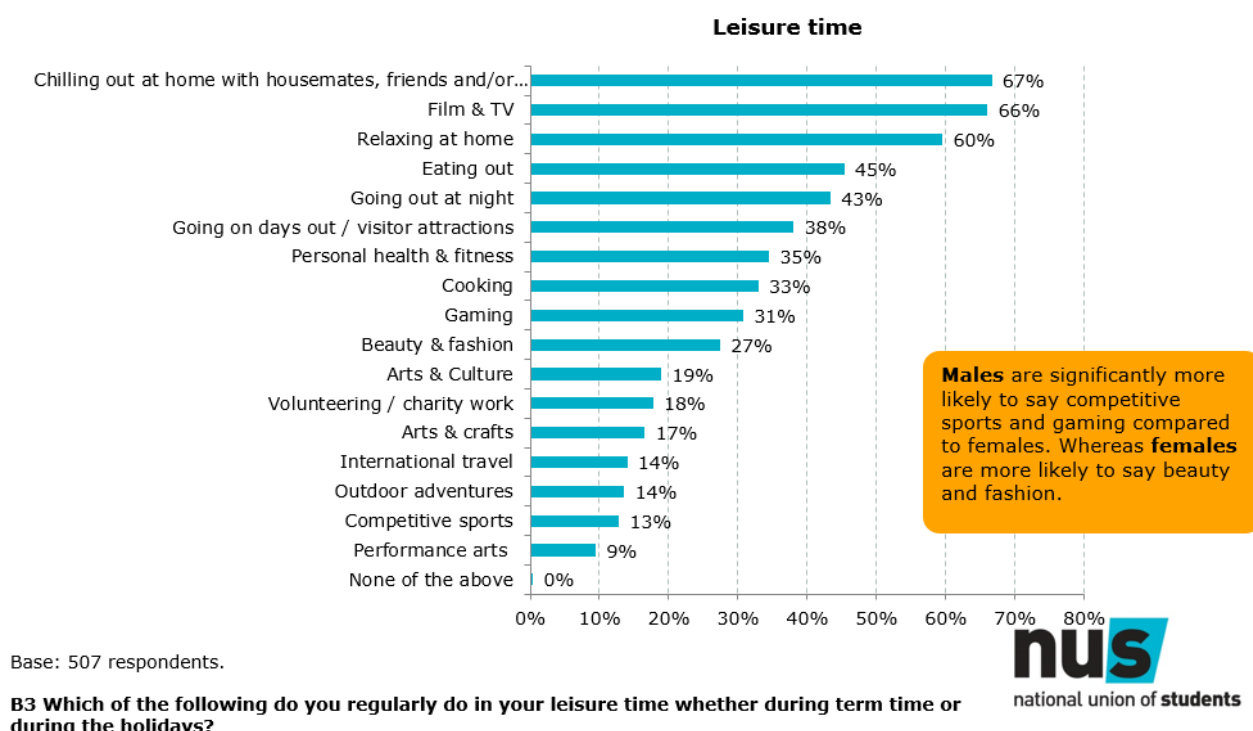


Leisure time

The majority of students from EH indicated that they enjoy participating in relaxing activities during their leisure time such as chilling out at home with housemates, friends and family (67%) and watching films and TV (66%). Social activities such as eating out (45%) and going out at night (43%) are also popular for about two fifths. Despite personal health and fitness being a leisure activity for 35%, only 13% take part in competitive sports.

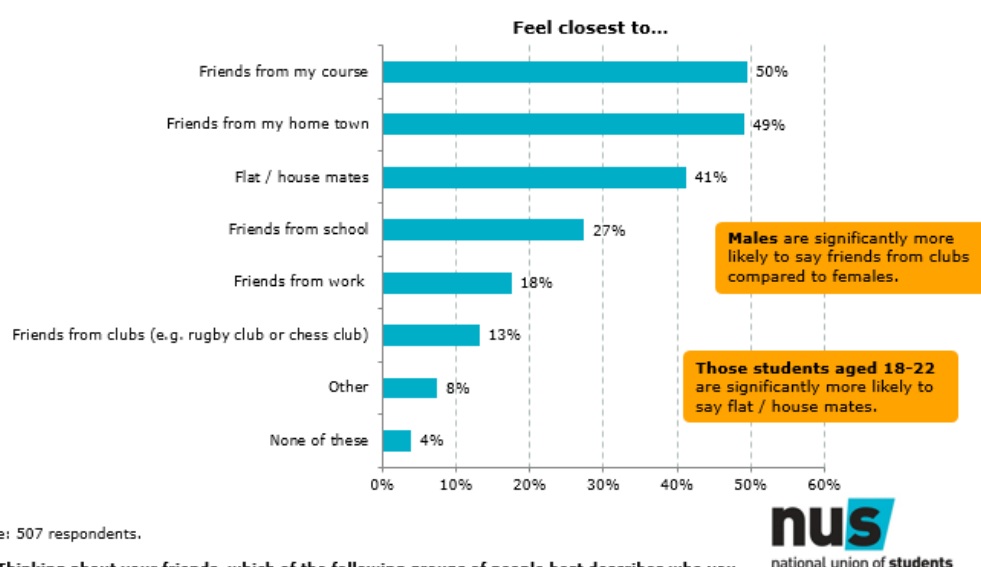
Amongst EH students, we also see that males are significantly more likely to say they take part in competitive sports and gaming, whereas females are more likely to say they enjoy beauty and fashion.

Figure 3: Student survey. Leisure time



Friendships

EH students say they feel closest to their course friends (50%) which is perhaps down to them having a shared interest, whilst 49% say they are closest to their friends from home. Those aged 18-22 years old are significantly more likely to say they are closest to their flat/house mates than any other age group and males are more likely to say they are closest to friends from a club which links to them being more likely to be playing a competitive sport in their leisure time.

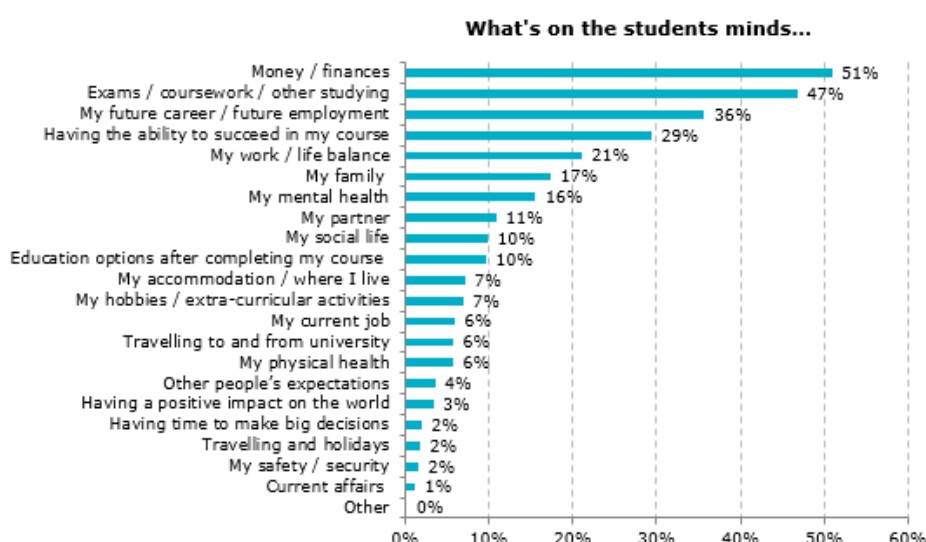
Figure 4: Student survey. Friendship group respondents feel closest to

B4 Thinking about your friends, which of the following groups of people best describes who you feel the closest to?

What's on Edge Hill students minds...

The main concerns for students are those focused on the here and now: over half (51%) of the students at EH indicated that money and finances are top of mind whilst being at university, followed by exams / coursework (47%). Success with their course is also a key concern with 29% thinking about the ability to succeed in their course and 36% thinking about looking for future employment.

On the other hand only 2% indicated that their safety and security is on their mind, signifying that they feel safe within their environment, which links to why many students chose EH.

Figure 5: Student survey. What's on the students minds...

Base: 507 respondents.

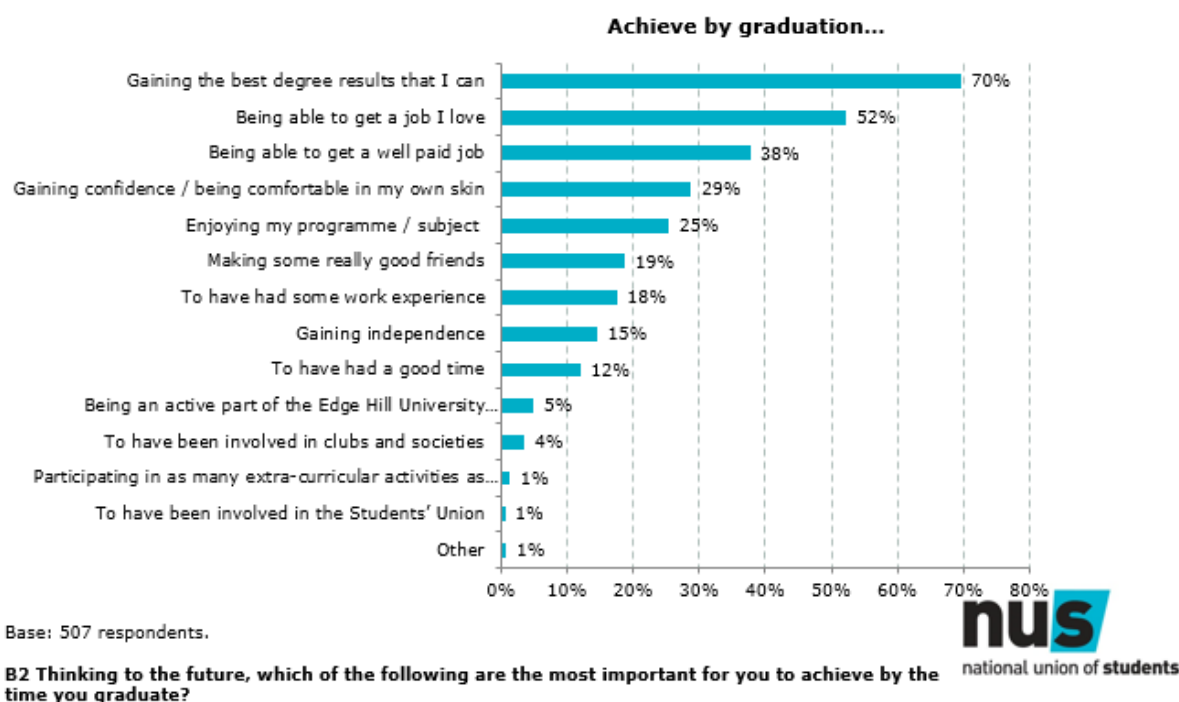
B1 Which of the following things are on your mind whilst at university? Please pick three

nus
national union of students

Achievements from University

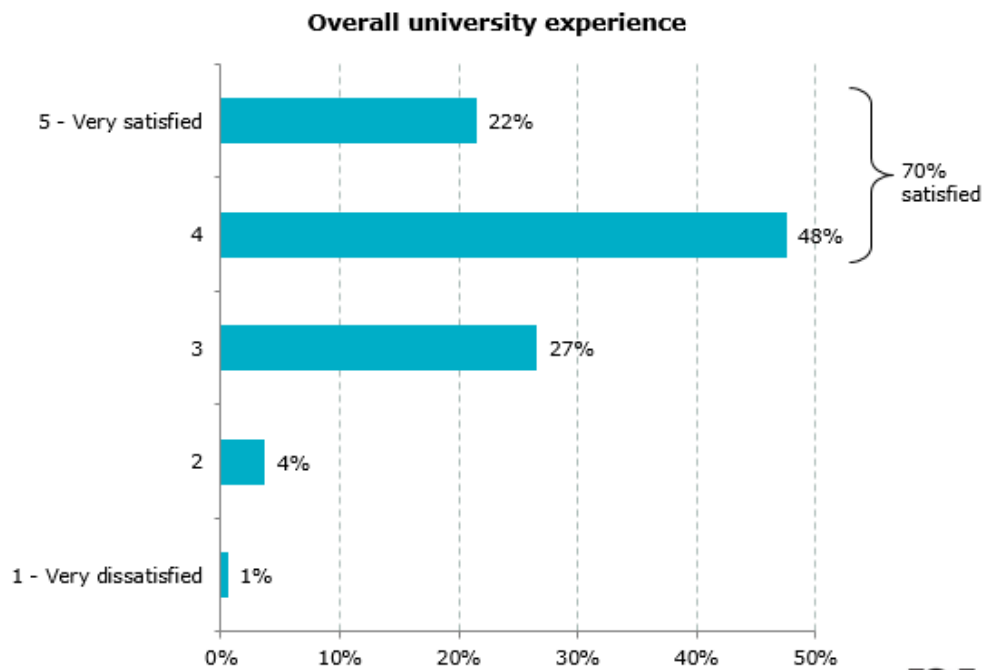
The majority (70%) of the students are most focused on the here and now – aiming to achieve the best results they can whilst at EHU. However, just over a half (52%) also think it is important to be able to get a job they love by the time they graduate. Despite EH students having different lifestyles, preferences and demographics, they are all equally concerned about their results and the job it leads to, emphasising the importance of academic and employability support.

Figure 6: Student survey. What's students wish to achieve by graduation



Overall satisfaction

Overall the majority (70%) of the students are satisfied with their overall experience so far at EHU. Interestingly, those students who don't feel like a 'typical' student (40%) and who tend to feel remote from the university experience still claim that they are satisfied with their university experience so far. This indicates that whilst they say they are having a different experience, they are still having a positive one.

Figure 7: Student survey. Overall university experience

Base: 507 respondents.

C6 Thinking about your overall university experience so far, how satisfied would you say you are so far with it, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 5 is very satisfied?

2.0 Why Edge Hill University?

In order to further increase understanding of students at EH, it's important to consider student motivations for choosing to study at EH and their attitudes towards EHU.

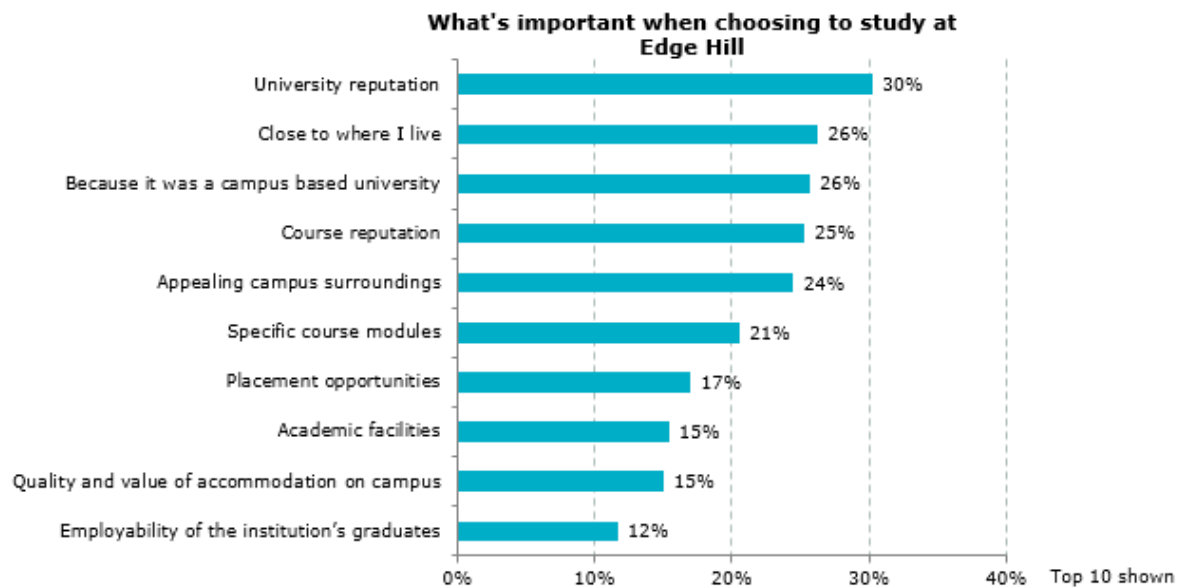
Students held a positive perception of the institution citing the atmosphere, environment and reputation as central to this feeling. How close the University campus is to the city and the courses offerings are also key drivers to choosing Edge Hill.

Motivations for choosing Edge Hill

Overall students cited that they had a positive perception of EHU and this is why they chose to study at EHU. Both the focus group participants and students who completed the online survey indicated that a key motivator to choosing EH was the atmosphere of the campus; it offers a friendly homely environment as well as being aesthetically pleasing with modern facilities. The closeness of the University to the city; the courses offered; the reputation of the University and class sizes are also influential drivers to choosing EH. Surprisingly employment of the institution graduates is only important to one in ten, yet we saw in figure 6 52% stated they wish to achieve a job they love and 38% said they wanted to get a well-paid job as a result of graduating. This implies that they aren't using previous student success rates as an indicator for the future, instead focusing on what they want from university whilst they are studying rather than the post university possibilities. Perhaps there is a further need to communicate the current SU employment services to help students find jobs following graduation.

Figure 8: Focus groups. Drivers to choosing EH



Figure 9: Student survey. Importance when choosing EHU

Base: 507 respondents.

C3. Which of the following were most important to you when choosing to study at Edge Hill University ?

nus
national union of students

What's good about Edge Hill

Participants from the focus groups discussed what's good about Edge Hill and why they enjoy studying at EHU. Once again the atmosphere has an impact on the overall perception, with students feeling that it is a friendly, safe and a relaxed environment. The support students have received and opportunities available were also linked to their positive perspective, along with the good sport facilities which are likely to play a big part for those who spend their leisure time looking after their health and fitness, or playing competitive sports. However we are aware from figure 3 that only 13% of EH students are participating in competitive sports, therefore there is a need to communicate and promote the excellent facilities that are available to the students.

Figure 10: Student focus group. What's good about Edge Hill

What's bad about Edge Hill

On the other hand, the annoyance of everyday practicalities, alongside some students feeling left out, are the reasons given as to why EHU doesn't always feel like a great place to be. Practicalities such as the commute, parking and traffic are considered to be issues for some students, as well as the laundrette usage and costs.

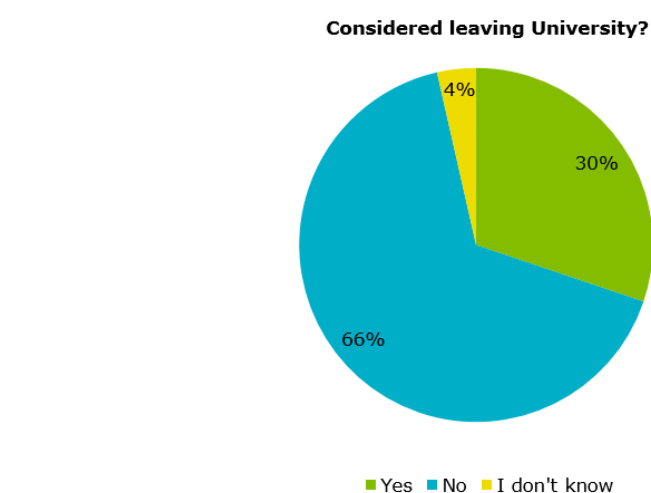
Inclusion is also a concern for some, especially amongst those who don't class themselves as a 'typical' student. They can feel left out due to practical issues such as working too many hours which prevents them from getting involved in the social side of university and having difficulties getting to campus events and societies.

Figure 11: Student focus group. What's bad about Edge Hill



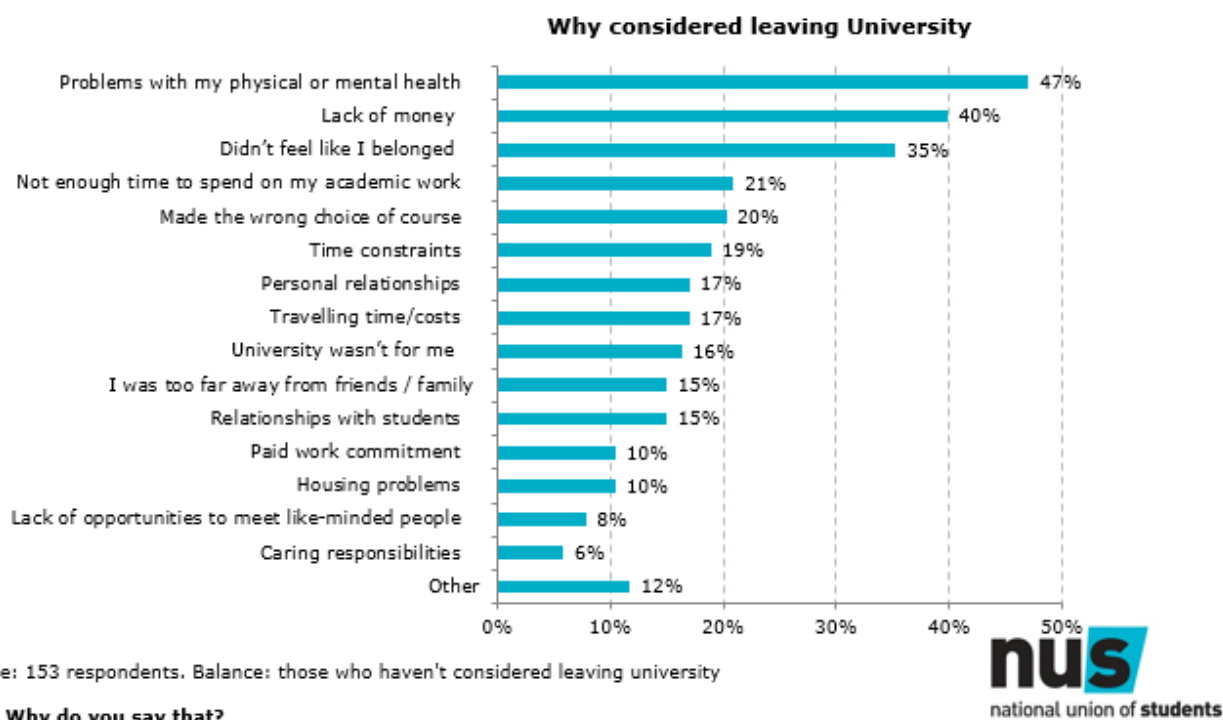
Even though the majority (70%) of students are satisfied with their overall experience at EHU, just under a third (30%) of EHU students have considered leaving university. Reasons for this are linked to problems with their physical or mental health (47%), lack of money (40%) and not feeling like they belonged (35%). This emphasises the need for services that offer support and advice both in terms of mental health as well as in managing the practical aspects of university such as finances.

Figure 12: Student survey. Considering leaving university



Base: 507 respondents.

C4 Have you ever seriously considered leaving university?

Figure 13: Student survey. Reasons why students have considered leaving university

3.0 Relationship with institution stakeholders

Understanding the relationship between EHSU and key institution stakeholders is important to this research as it allows for an appreciation of their perception of the SU to understand and develop.

Overall the relationship between the institution stakeholders and EHSU is positive. However, it became apparent that some institution stakeholders have more involvement with the SU than others. It was felt that the relationship between institution stakeholders and the SU could be improved through further communication, leading to an increase in awareness and an appreciation of the work the SU does.

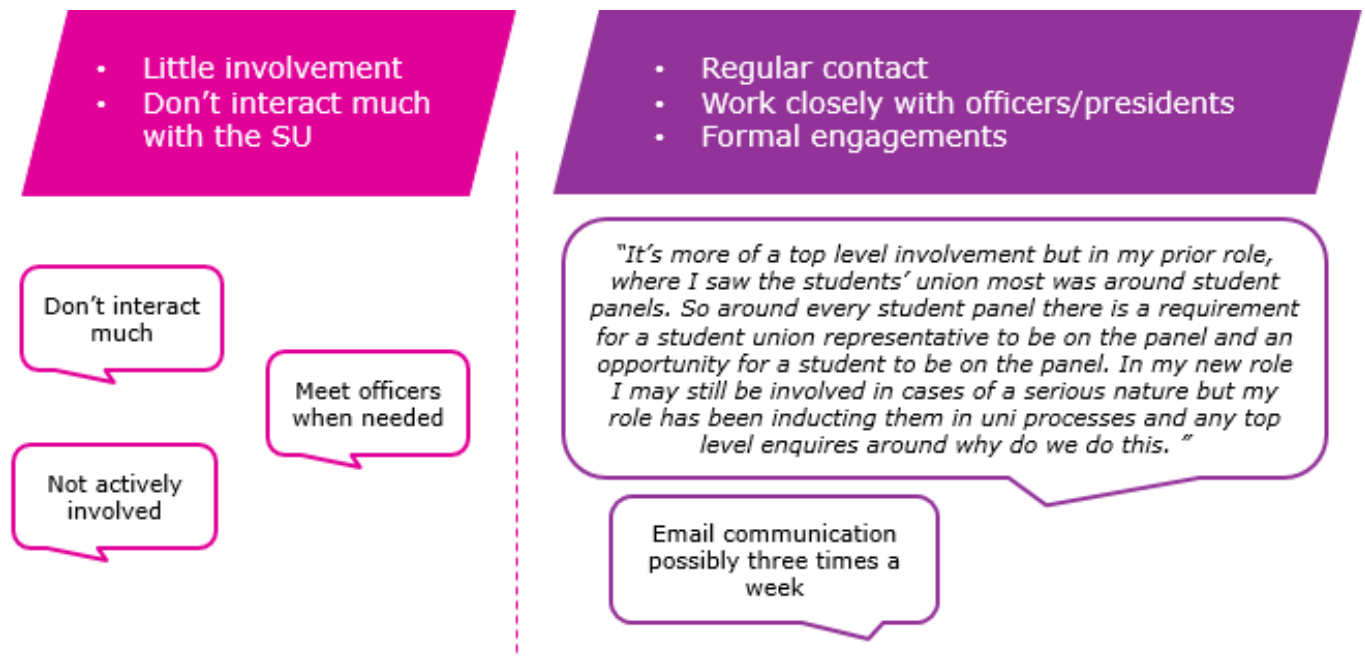
Institution stakeholder's relationship with Edge Hill Students' Union

Overall institution stakeholders expressed that they had a positive relationship with the SU and that they wish to maintain and pursue communication channels and ensure they work together. They recognise the shared goals and objectives between the SU and EHU whilst expressing that working together, where possible, will be beneficial. Many spoke about an open door policy and the desire to keep on building strong relationships with open channels of communication.

The tele-depth interviews revealed that there are different levels of involvement between EHSU and key institution stakeholders. Some institution stakeholders speak to the SU on a regular basis and work closely with the elected officers, whereas others rarely interact with the SU. Some of the stakeholders who only see SU staff and officers at big meetings didn't feel they are as engaged as they could be and emphasised that if they are needed more often that they are willing to be more involved.

Many of the institution stakeholders recognise the journey that the SU has been on, praising the team on their development and hope to see it continue. However, there were comments about the ambition of EHSU with some concerned that there were areas where ambitions were too high and potentially unrealistic for the scope and size of EHU. These stakeholders recommended that SU staff focused on the basics and ensuring that EHSU was reaching as many EH students as possible, to both support and represent them.

Figure 14: tele-depth interviews. Level of involvement between the SU and key institution stakeholders



Key research objectives

The overarching objectives are to understand more about EHSU reputation, identify ways to improve the SU offerings from a student's perspective and explore communication methods.

In this section we will explore the main themes emerging from the research in the context of the core objectives:

- **Reputation**
- **Future of EHSU**
- **Communication**

4.0 Reputation

Objective 1:

- ↳ **EHSU are looking to conduct research to understand more about the SU reputation both internally with institution stakeholders across the institution and the SU, as well as with current students**

Gaining knowledge of students and stakeholder's perception of EHSU is fundamental to understand the perceived role of the SU and who the decision makers are. Recognising the reputation of the SU will allow EHSU to identify any areas that perhaps need to be addressed or improved.

Overall, students, institution stakeholders and SU staff believe the role of EHSU is to offer support, represent students and deliver a great experience for students. There are different opinions with regards to who the decision makers are, these being either the elected officers or senior managers at EHSU.

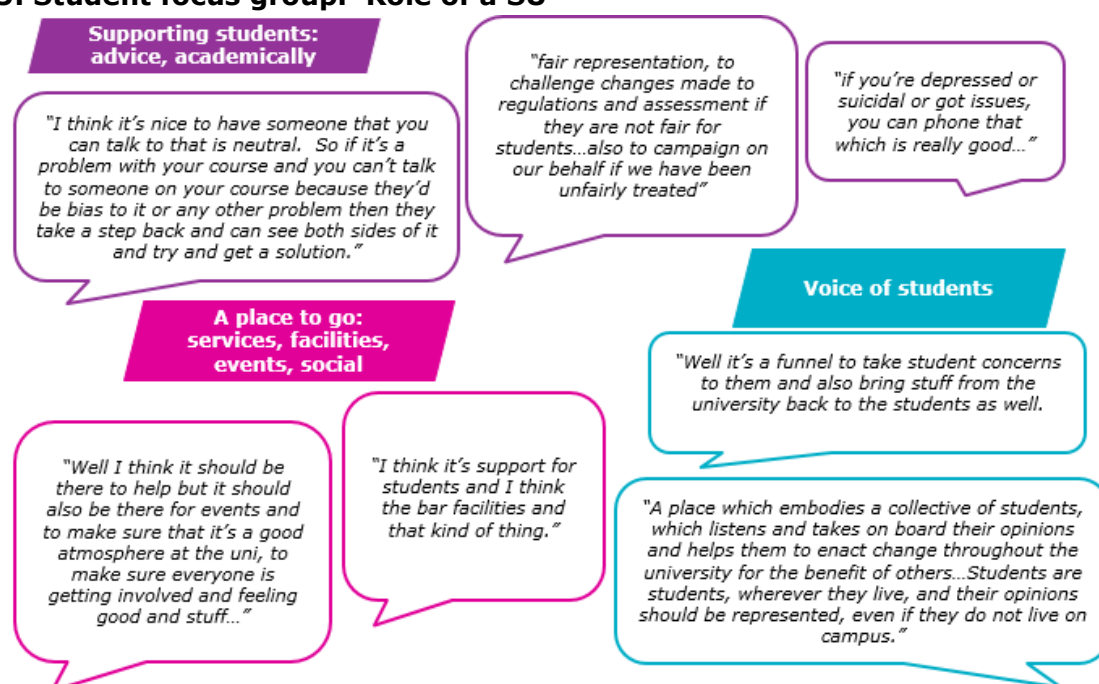
4.1 Expectations from a Students' Union

Role of Edge Hill Students' Union

Students and institution stakeholders were asked to describe the role of the SU. It became apparent that both students and institution stakeholders had similar expectations for the role of the SU...

Student's perspective

Students who completed the online survey and those who attended the focus groups, believe that the SU should provide support to and represent students, as well as be a place to go for commercial and membership services. This indicates that students don't solely see the SU as a forum to represent the voice of students but also for social reasons such as events, bars and social space.

Figure 15: Student focus group. Role of a SU

Institution stakeholder and SU staff perspective

Unprompted, institution stakeholders and SU staff indicated that the role of the SU is to represent the student body, provide advice and support, deliver a great experience for students and be inclusive.

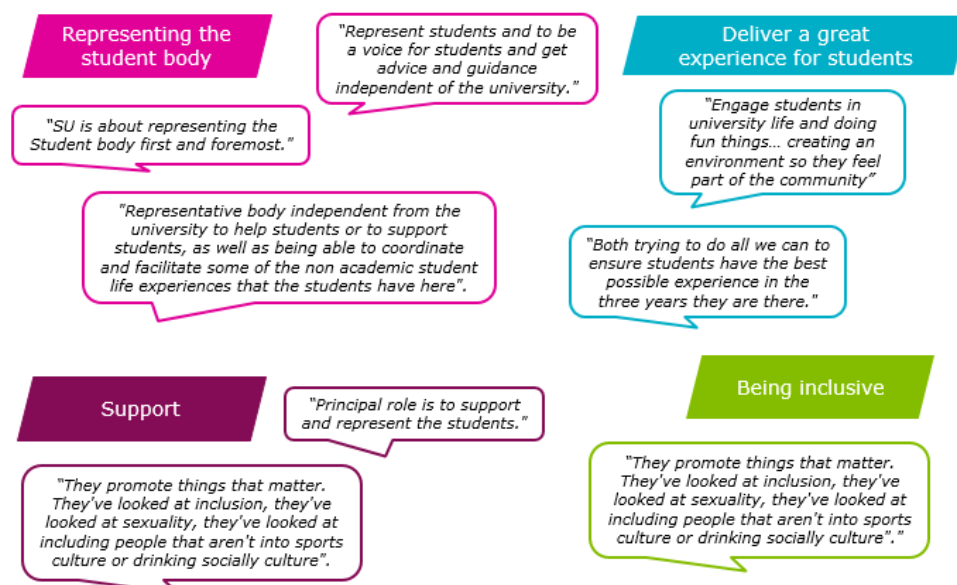
Figure 16: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Role of a Students' Union

Figure 17: SU staff survey. Role of a Students' Union

Describing Edge Hill Students' Union

When we asked both students and institution stakeholders to describe EHSU the majority were positive, mainly describing EHSU as being professional, open and supportive. However, institution stakeholders and students have different views regarding inclusion with institution stakeholders stating that EHSU is inclusive to all, whereas students feeling this is less so.

Student's perspective

Students in the focus groups were asked to describe the SU as a person. Overall the students were more positive than negative using words such as open, helpful and understanding. However others also felt that the SU is not completely inclusive, can be aloof and stubborn.

Figure 18: Student focus group. Describing the SU as a person.

Institution stakeholder's perspective

Institution stakeholders were asked to describe the SU in three words – figure 19. Overall the words used to describe the SU were positive, with professional being stated most frequently, followed by the terms approachable and inclusive. However, words such as inexperienced and naïve were mentioned by those who wanted the SU to focus on getting the basics completely right before taking on too much.

SU staff were also asked to describe EHSU; like students, they believe the SU to be supportive and developing.

Figure 19: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Describing the SU in 3 words



Figure 20: SU staff online survey. Describing the SU in 3 words

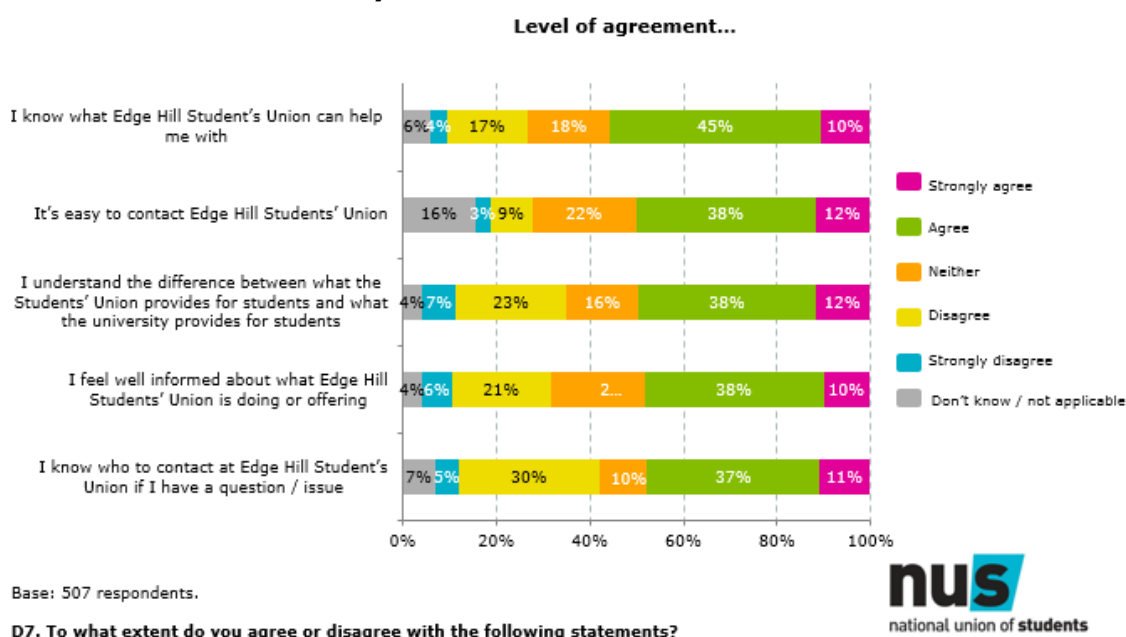


Awareness of Edge Hill Students' Union facilities

Over half (55%) of the students who completed the online survey know what EHSU can help them with and just under half (48%) agree that they feel well informed about what EHSU is doing or offering. Although this is positive, with half understanding what EHSU do, there is an opportunity to increase the awareness of EHSU offerings to their students.

Over a third (35%) disagree that they know who to contact if they have questions or issues. This again illustrates the need to increase the knowledge and awareness of the SU services and the members of staff who deal with support, advice, memberships and well-beginning via signposting etc. amongst students.

Figure 21: Students online survey. Awareness of EHSU

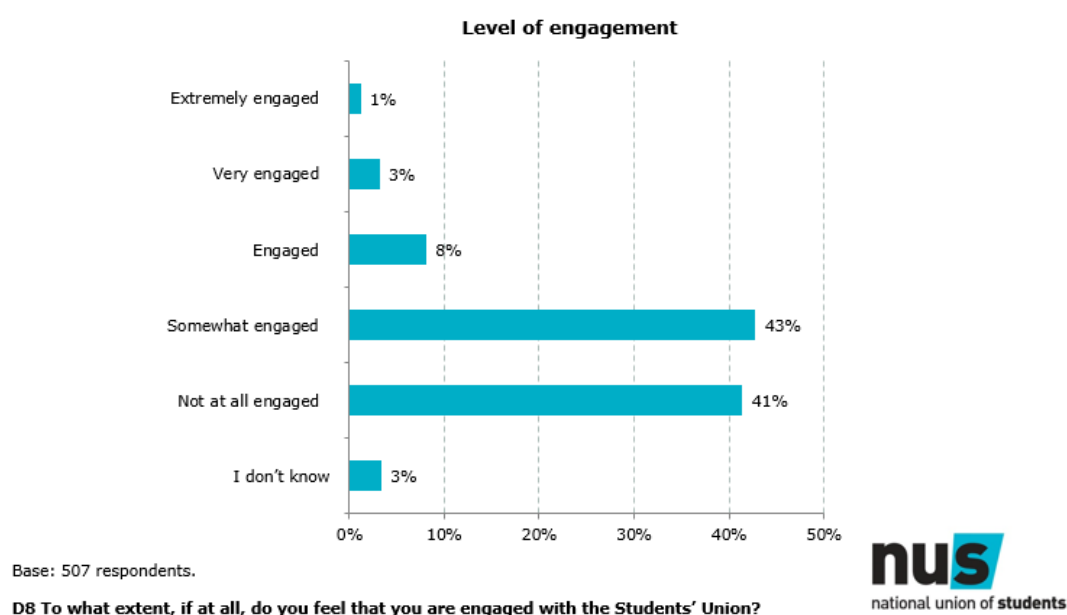


Students were then asked how engaged they feel with EHSU, these figures reiterate the fact that there is room to improve the awareness of EHSU with 41% of the students saying they do not feel at all engaged with the SU and 43% saying they felt somewhat engaged. Respondents were asked to comment on their level of engagement and the main reasons for not engaging with EHSU are:

- Don't use the services or feel they have no need to
- Don't know about the SU or what they do
- Never had any contact with them

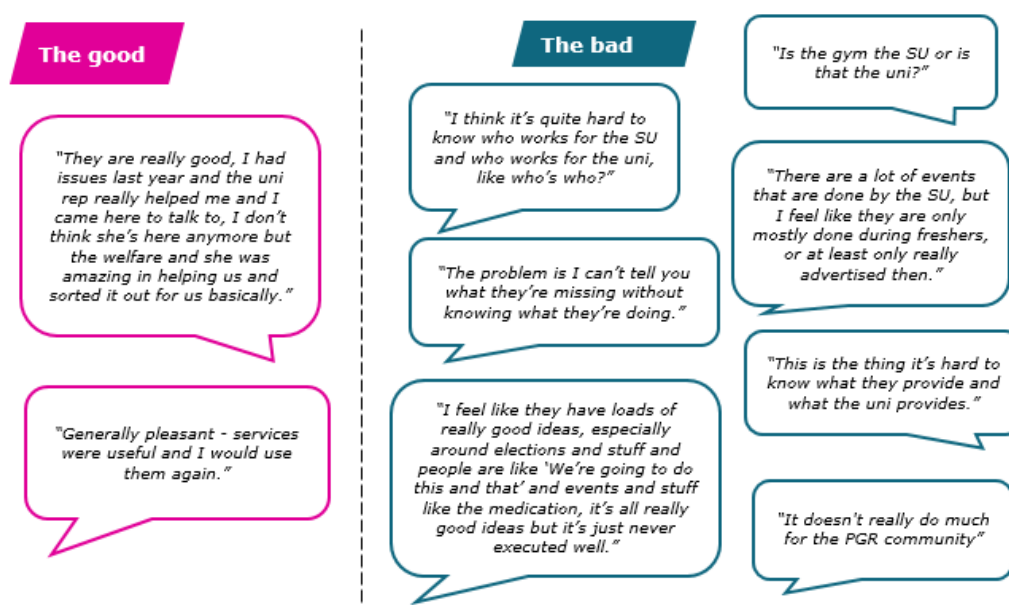
Again this echoes the need to increase awareness and knowledge of EHSU amenities to make it a destination for students who may require the services.

Figure 22: Students online survey. Level of engagement with EHSU



The findings from the online survey are also reflected in the focus group in that there is a general sense that the SU offers a pleasant and helpful service. However, focus group respondents don't really seem to understand the full package of what the SU offers and who the SU are, with some confusion between SU services and the University services. There were discussions around the execution of some events, with focus group participants expressing that the SU events could and should be good, but they felt that they are a bit too expensive and there are too few attending them as not enough people hear about them.

Figure 23: Students focus group. Opinions on the SU offerings



4.2 Decision makers

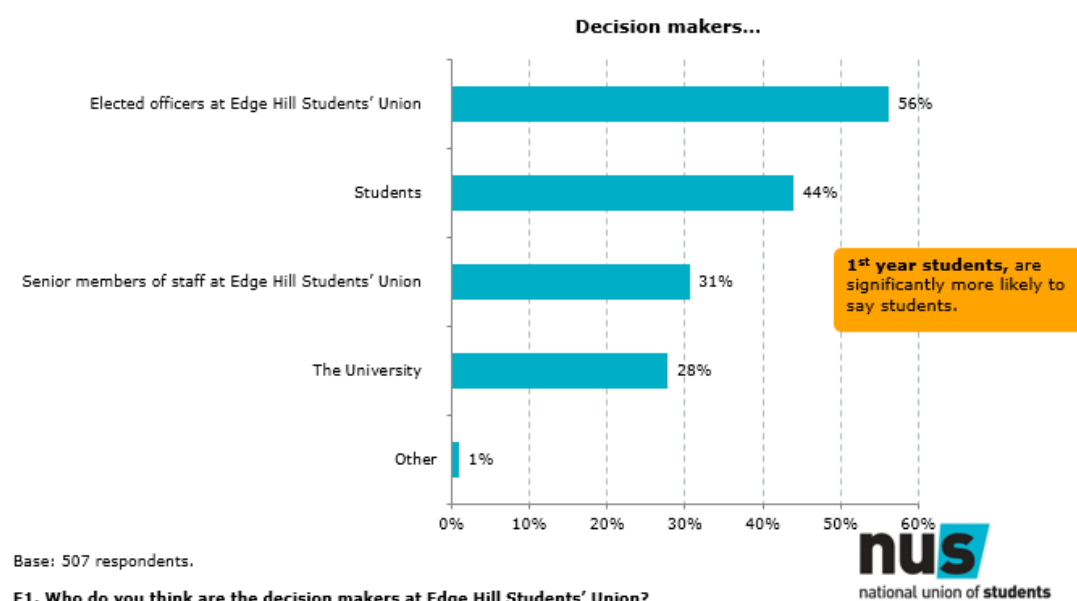
Who are the decision makers at Edge Hill Students' Union?

There were mixed opinions on who the main decision makers at EHSU are believed to be. However, the majority of students, institution stakeholders and SU staff stated they felt it was the elected officers and/or EHSU senior members of staff.

Student's perspective

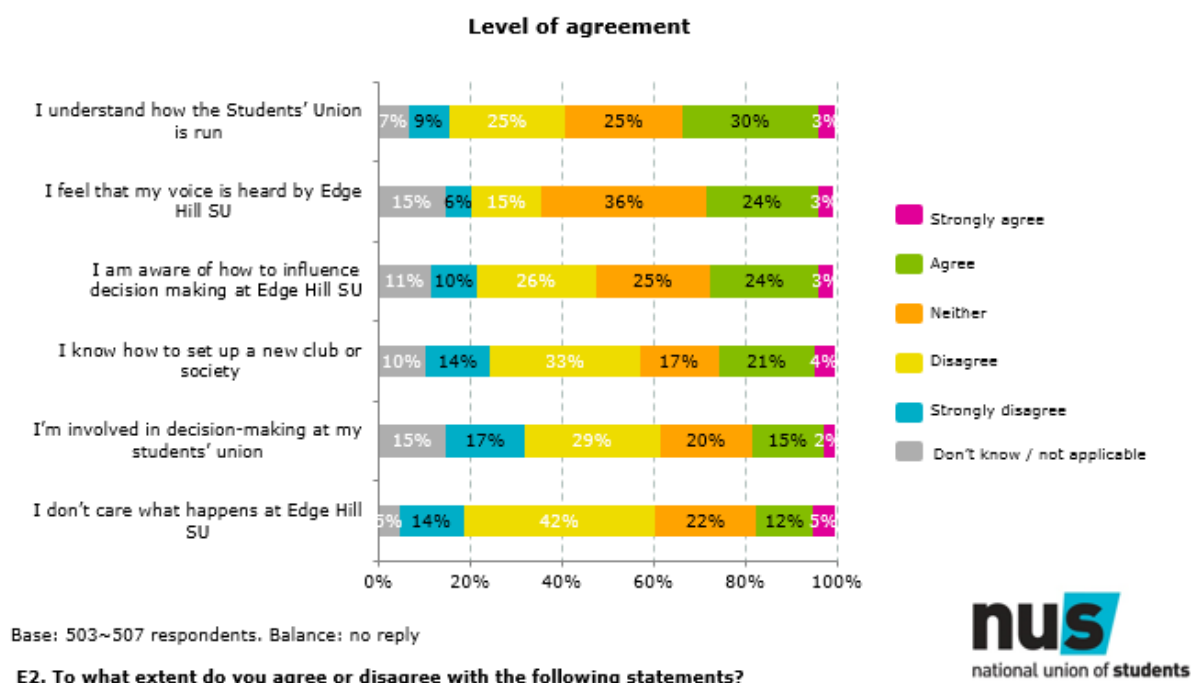
Over half (56%) of the students believe that elected officers at EHSU are the decision makers, followed by two fifths (44%) saying it was students themselves. Those who are in their first year are significantly more likely to say students than those in any other year group. Just under a third (31%) of respondents believe senior members of staff at EHSU to be the decision makers. Interestingly, just over a quarter (28%) of students think that it is the University itself making the decisions for the SU which is a similar number to those believing it's the SU staff. This indicates that there is confusion amongst students surrounding the running of the SU and the decision making process illustrated by figure 24.

Figure 24: Student online survey. Who are EHSU decision makers?



Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a number of statements relating to the organisation of the SU. Only a third (33%) of respondents said they understand how the SU is run and just 27% are aware of how to influence decision making, again this highlights the lack of understanding the students have on the structure of the SU.

Figure 25: Student online survey. Level of agreement



Institution stakeholder's perspective

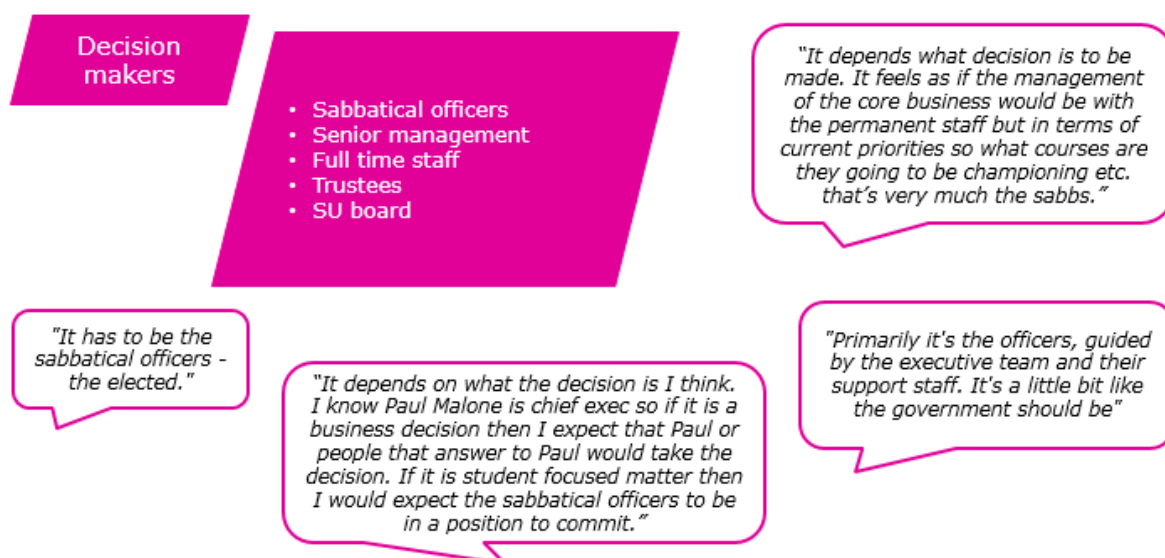
In terms of the institution stakeholders there is a general census that it depends on what the decision to be made is as to who the decision makers are. The majority sense that the sabbatical officers are

primarily the decision makers and that the senior members of staff from EHSU are there to support the direction. Many expressed the view that the officers should be making the majority of the decisions, with advice and guidance from the permanent staff, and that staff need to be involved with certain decisions e.g. the more commercial ones.

Many compared the set-up of the SU as being akin to the way the government works and believe the structure of the SU should work in the same way: *"Primarily it's the officers, guided by the executive team and their support staff. It's a little bit like the government should be", "the executive officers should be the voice but the permanent staff are the equivalent of the civil service and in that respect should be putting in some degree of continuity."*

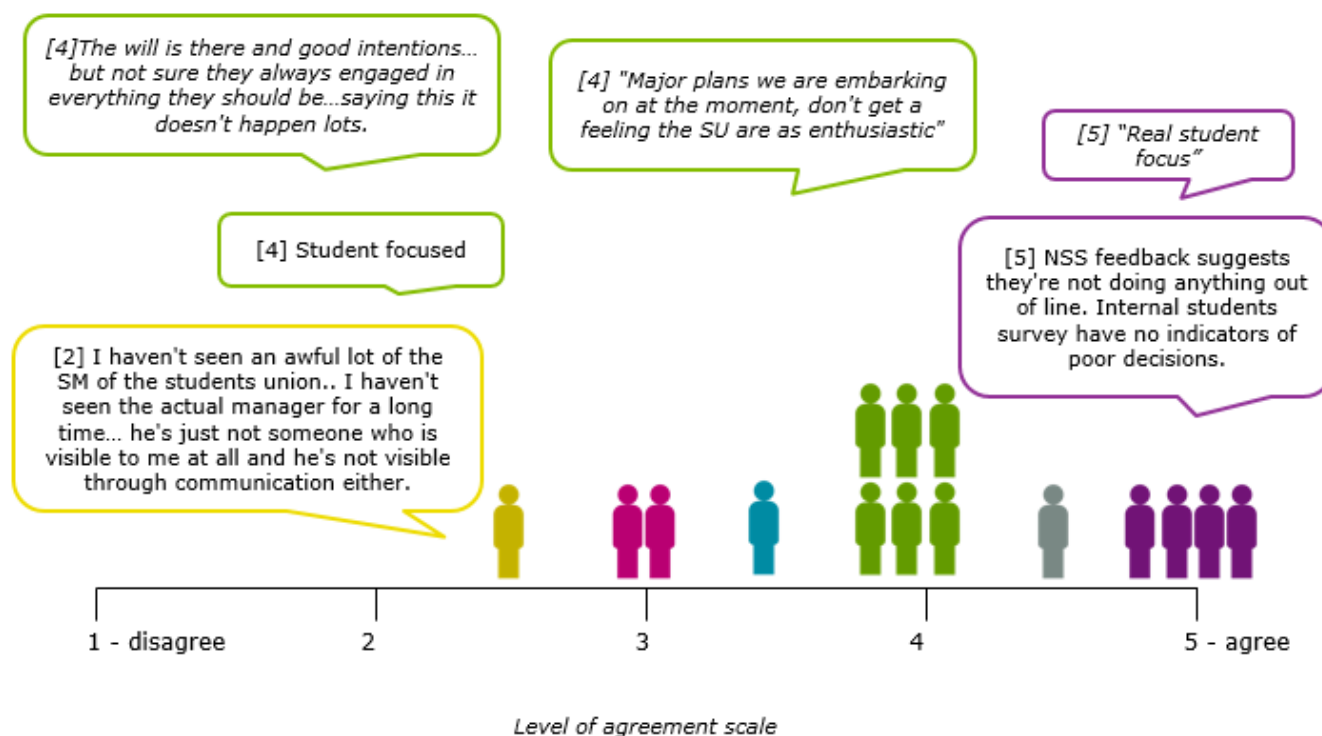
SU staff think that the senior members of staff are the decision makers at EHSU, however, there are mixed views as to whether or not they should be. Some of the SU staff believe the elected officers should be the decision makers and should have the opportunity to have a greater input into all aspects of the SU. Others, however, believe the senior managers are there to provide advice and support.

Figure 26: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Decision makers.



When institution stakeholders were asked if they agreed that senior managers at EHSU are making the right decisions for EH students, the majority of the respondents agree (rating 4 out of 5 on a level of agreement scale). It is believed that the senior managers are student focused, they have good intentions and receive regular feedback (via the means of NSS survey and institution internal surveys), suggesting they are doing things correctly through monitoring and evaluating.

Figure 27: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Level of agreement – "senior managers are making the right decisions for EHSU"



Elected officers at Edge Hill Students' Union

Students expressed their concerns regarding the lack of awareness of who the elected officers are and institutional stakeholders spoke around the challenges faced with the quick turnaround of a yearlong officer post.

Student's perspective

There was a mixed understanding from the focus groups as to who the elected officers are and what they do. The general feeling was that individuals are not empowered to enact change and that they don't really see what the union is doing. There was mention about using the ideas page of the SU website although not everyone seemed to know what this was and driving traffic to the SU website might be a challenge in itself.

However, the majority of respondents in the survey found the SU as a whole to be approachable and the friendliness and approachability of the SU officers was mentioned a number of times in the focus groups. Some students described feeling uncomfortable approaching officers in their offices and some perceive them as not being accessible. There was some discussion that the officers tend to come from the sports teams and elections were described as a 'popularity contest', raising concerns that decisions/policies would focus on particular teams/societies.

Figure 28: Student focus group. Elected officers

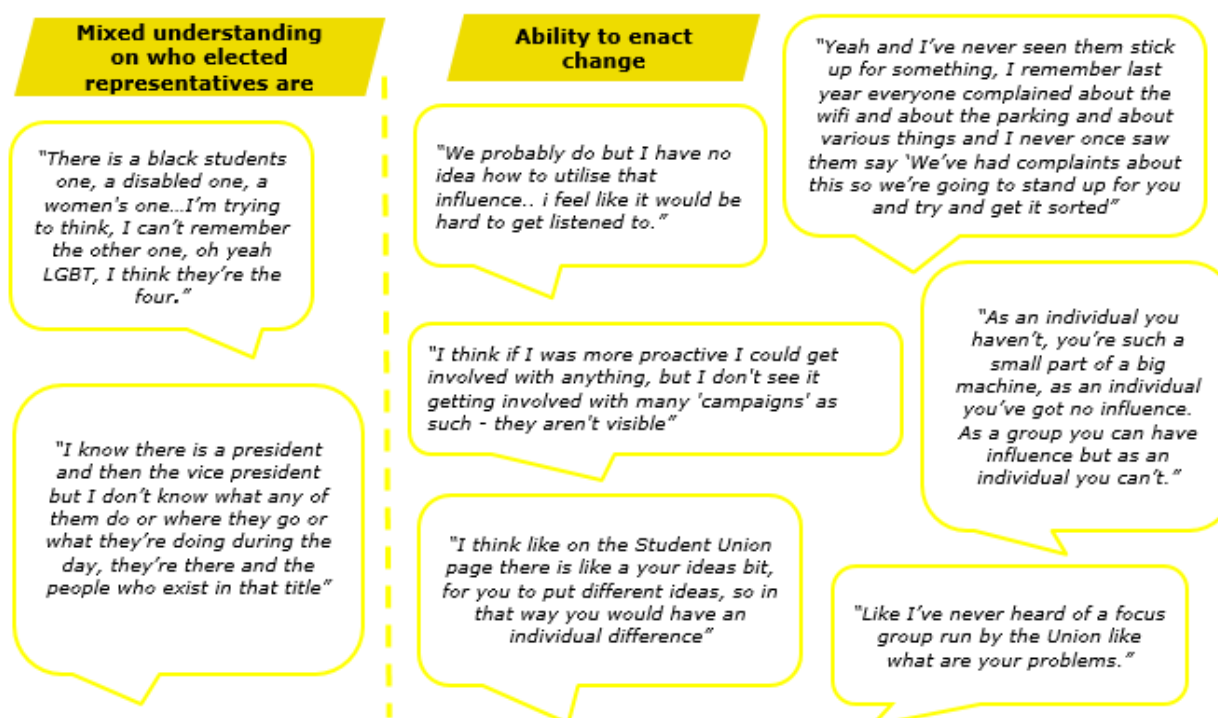
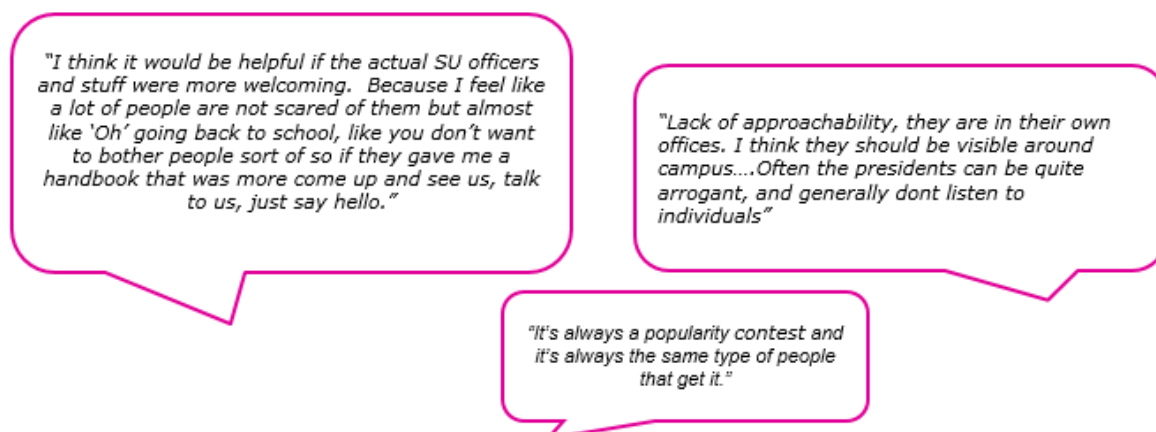


Figure 29: Students focus group. Elected officers



Within the student survey respondents were asked to indicate their level of awareness of the elected officers. Whilst the majority of the respondents (78%) do know who they are, just under a fifth (22%) stated that they don't know, again suggesting that there is an opportunity and need to increase the awareness and presence of the elected officers.

About a quarter (27%) feel that the elected officers represent their voice and only a fifth (19%) feel that they are kept informed of what elected officers are doing. This indicates that there is a need for

EHSU to increase students understanding of what the elected officers are doing for their students and ensuring that students know their voice is heard.

Figure 30: Students online survey. Awareness of elected officers

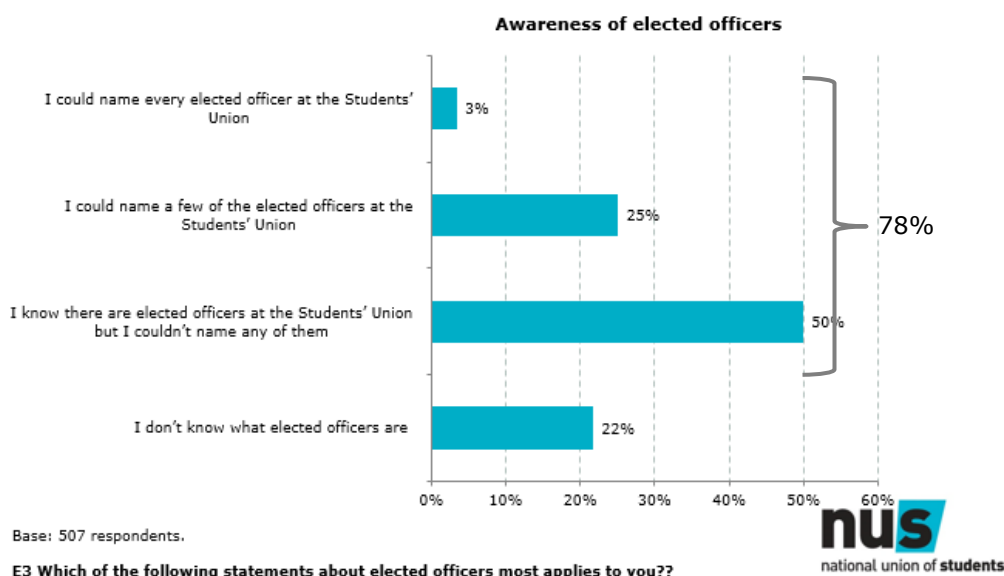
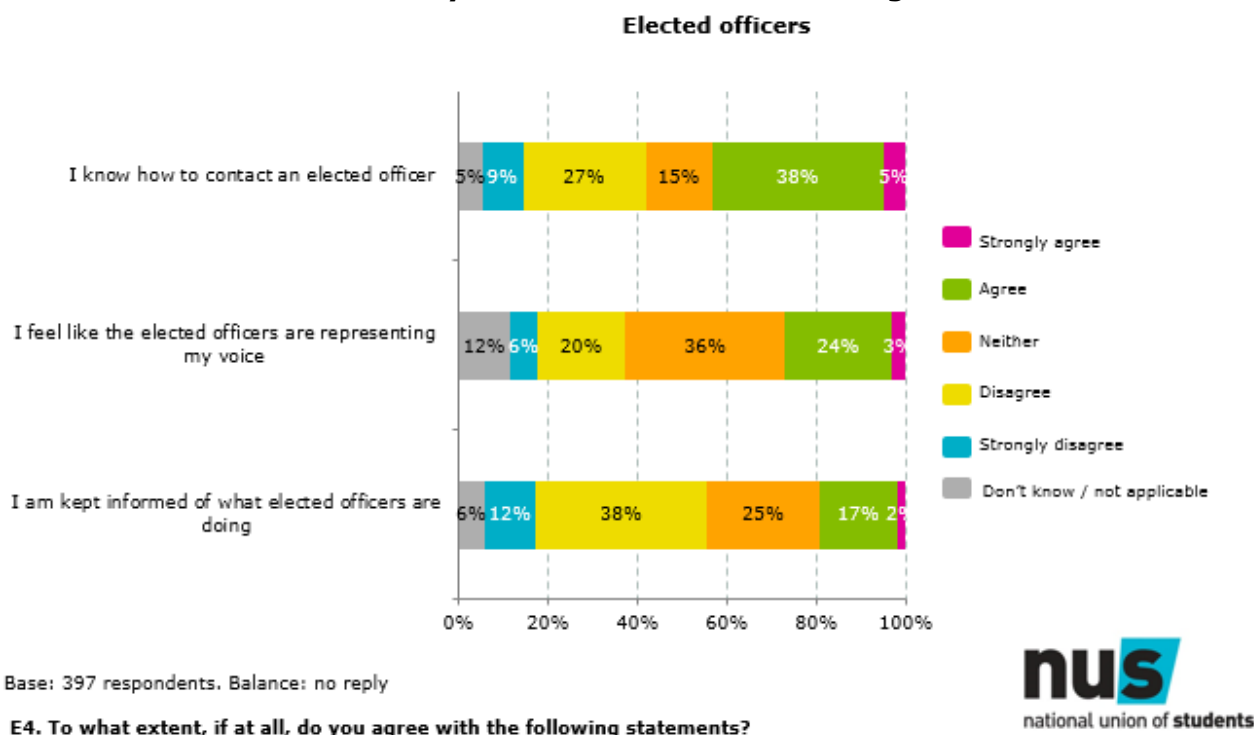


Figure 31: Students online survey. Elected officers – level of agreement



Institution stakeholder's perspective

Institution stakeholders identified the turnaround time of the elected officers to be a weakness for EHSU. It is perceived that by the time the elected officers become settled and adjust to the SU environment their time in the position has come to an end, thus causing a lack of continuity.

Furthermore, it is felt that the nature of the position could consequentially put pressure on the permanent members of staff at EHSU due to the support required for officers from the point of campaigning.

Suggestions were made to either change this to a two year cycle or to take extra time from the start of the campaign period to work closely with potential officers to sufficiently prepare them for the role. There were also suggestions about working with potential officers as early as possible to help develop their campaign policies in line with what the SU can feasibly facilitate and what's realistic.

4.3 Visibility

Physical visibility of Edge Hill Students' Union

Students and institution stakeholders discussed the physical visibility of EHSU, again there was a mix of opinions on how clear the SU building layout is, in addition to the awareness of who to contact for what.

Student's perspective

Just under two thirds (62%) of respondents who completed the online survey said that they felt the SU is accessible and over half (54%) believe EH is approachable. However participants at the focus group highlighted that it isn't clear who to contact for what; some have searched online but have been unsuccessful whilst others have visited the SU and felt that the SU staff were hidden away. This was also highlighted from the online survey (figure 21) with only 35% disagreeing that they know who to contact should they have any issues or questions.

Figure 32: Students focus group. Awareness of who to contact



Institution stakeholder's perspective

Some of the institution stakeholders felt that the SU had good visibility due to the location of the SU and the presence of the elected officers (photographs of them in the SU). However, others felt there was a weakness in that the SU lacks a clear, physical base as they are dispersed over the campus and this could have an impact on the overall awareness of EHSU. There is a need to clearly signpost and direct people to where services are located and who to contact for those services.

4.4 Wider community

Local community perception

Student's perspective

Students who participated in the focus groups discussed the positive contribution students at EH have made within the local community, however, they feel they don't always get the recognition they

deserve. The Christian group often organise charitable events supporting the students in the local community but feel this can get over shadowed by acts of other societies and teams.

Institution stakeholder's perspective

Similar to students, institution stakeholders believe students don't always get the recognition they deserve. It is perceived that the SU and institution are held to unreasonable expectations from the local community in the sense that Ormskirk has a middle class, fairly senior profile. This interesting juxtaposition between students and the local community is seen to be a challenge for the SU.

Whilst it's acknowledged that students generally get a harder time in the media, institution stakeholders identified an opportunity to publicise and communicate the good that EHSU and students are doing for the local and national community to help improve these perceptions. Some mentioned that this could also be an opportunity for students to develop their community skills and enhance their CV by emphasising the good that they have done. It could also be considered as helpful for those who don't live on campus as it might be a way of making them feel more included in the EH community.

5.0 Future of Edge Hill Students' Union

Objective 2:

- ✎ **EHSU want to understand how to improve their SU offering from a student's point of view: what are their needs, aspirations and how do they want to see EHSU grow?**

Planning for the future is vital for any business, understanding the thoughts of institution stakeholders, students and SU staff will allow EHSU to gain an appreciation for what they believe the priorities should be and where strategies could be focused.

Overall satisfaction of EHSU is high, it is believed that the SU performs well across all areas; however, there are some improvements that could be made, particularly around:

- **Being more inclusive by offering varied events**
- **Improving the quality and cost of commercial goods**
- **Educating students on what the SU does**
- **Offering more varied and diverse societies**

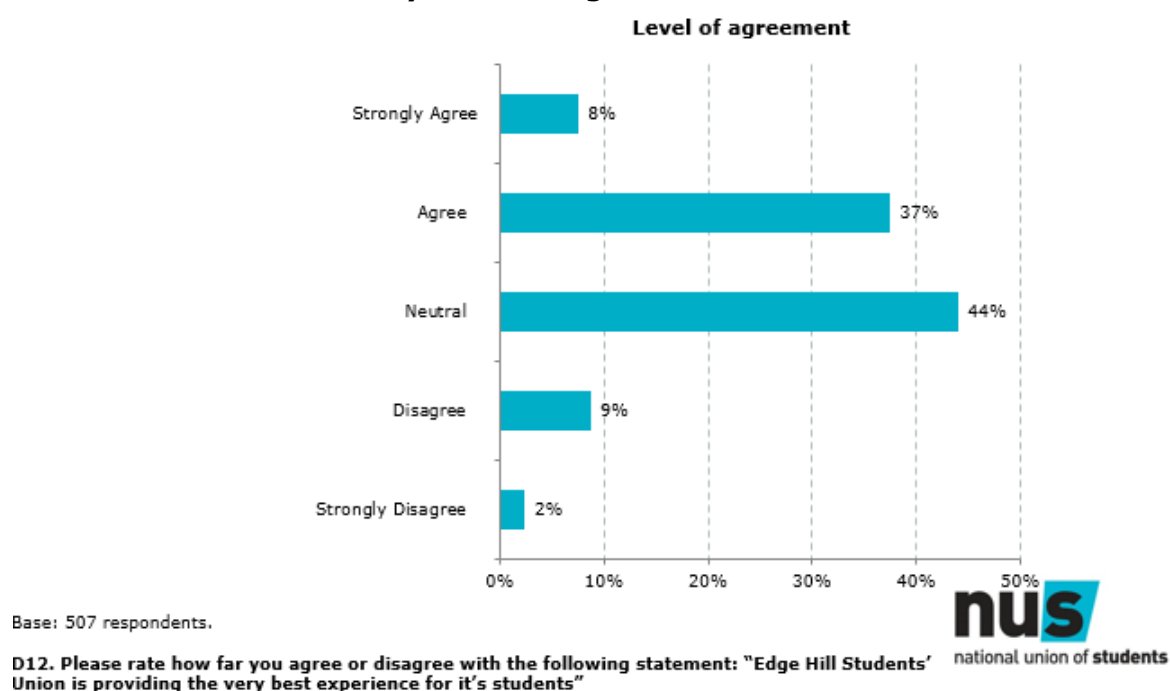
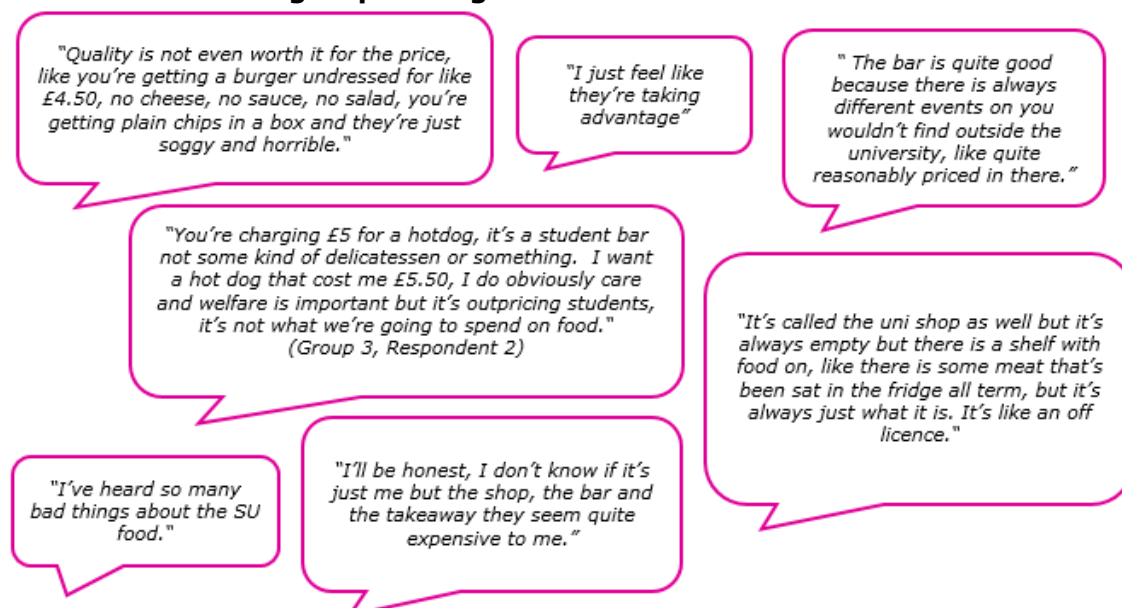
5.1 Edge Hill Students' Union services

Satisfaction with Edge Hill Students' Union services

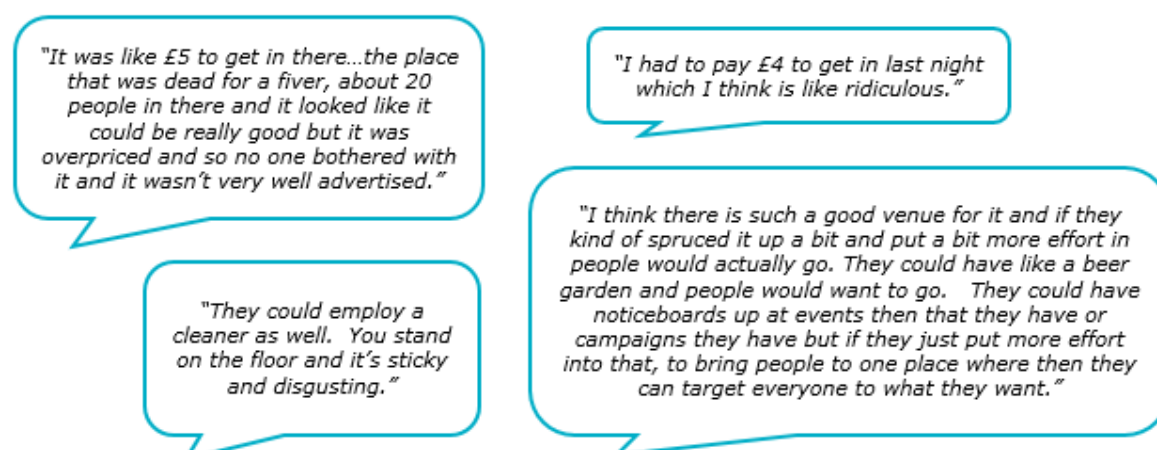
Student's perspective

Almost half (45%) of the respondents who completed the EH student's survey online indicated that they agree "*Edge Hill Students' Union is providing the very best experience for its students*" however one in ten (11%) disagree and 44% are neutral. This result is pleasing, however it reiterates the lack of awareness students have of the SU with 44% being impartial.

Students also stated that they were most satisfied with the SU Shop (62%), SU Bar (60%) and food and drink outlet (52%) signifying that many are content with the commercial offerings. However focus group participants felt that the cost and quality of the food/goods sold are too expensive and considered to be poor quality.

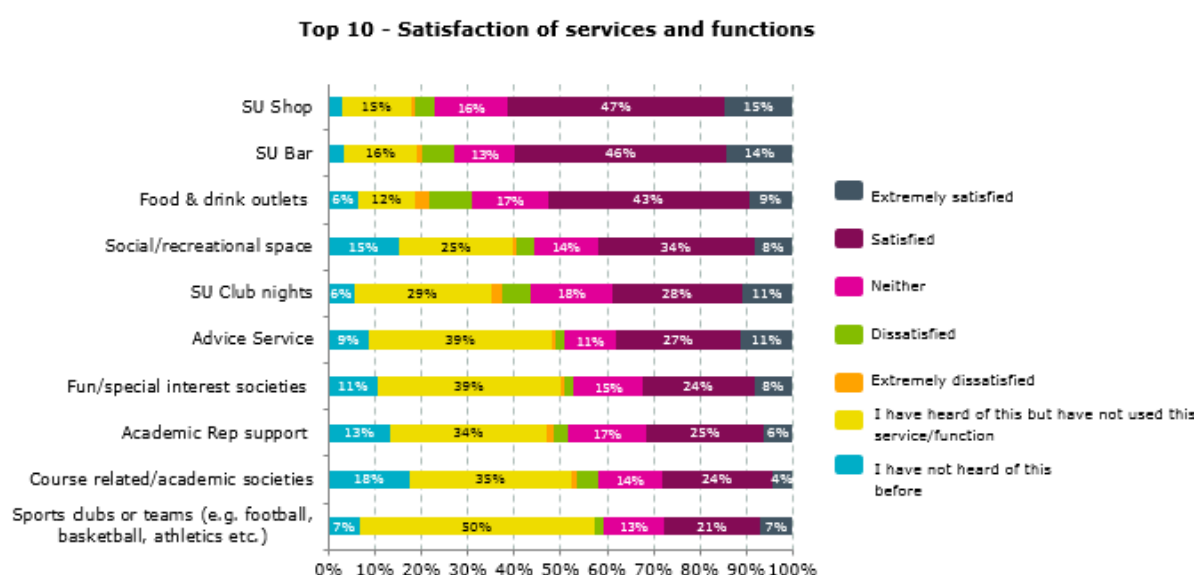
Figure 33: Students online survey. Level of agreement**Figure 34: Students focus group. Thoughts on SU commercial area**

Similarly, the SU social venues faced criticism for both the price and the facilities provided

Figure 35: Students focus group. Thoughts on SU social venues

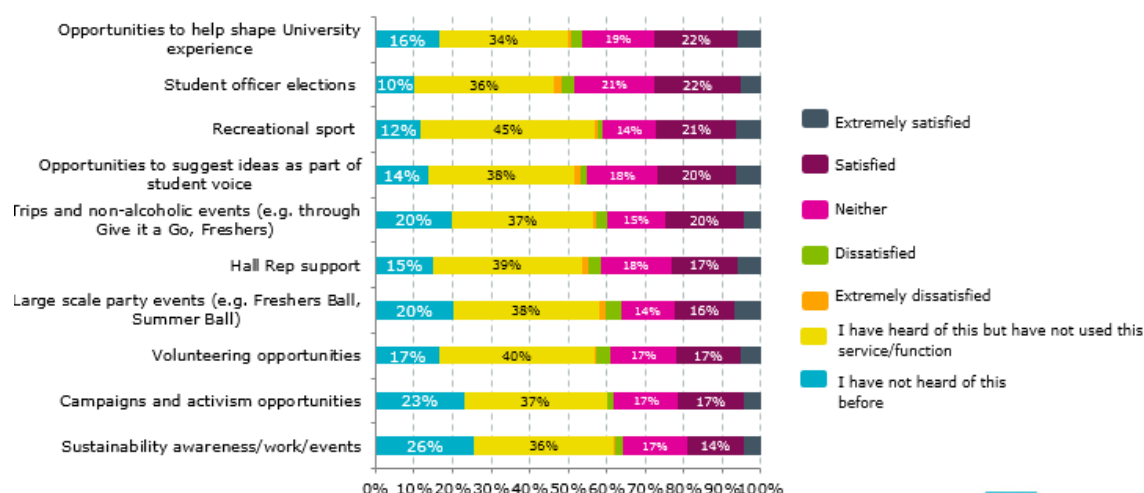
Overall, of those who have rated the services, the majority are satisfied and there's only a small amount stating any dissatisfaction. The advice services score the highest of the membership (rather than commercial) services, with 38% being satisfied, followed by fun / special interest societies and Academic Rep support.

However, many students had either not used or not heard of the different services, highlighting an area of concern. If students aren't using services it may be because they simply don't need them, but it could be because they don't understand the benefit or how to access it. This along with the significant percentage who aren't aware of many of the services shows a need for more or clearer communication to educate students on what's available and how it can help them.

Figure 36: Students online survey. Level of satisfaction with services and facilities

D4. Thinking about the areas you may have heard about, how satisfied, if at all, are you with the following services or functions provided by Edge Hill Students' Union?

Bottom 10 - Satisfaction of services and functions



Base: 507 respondents.

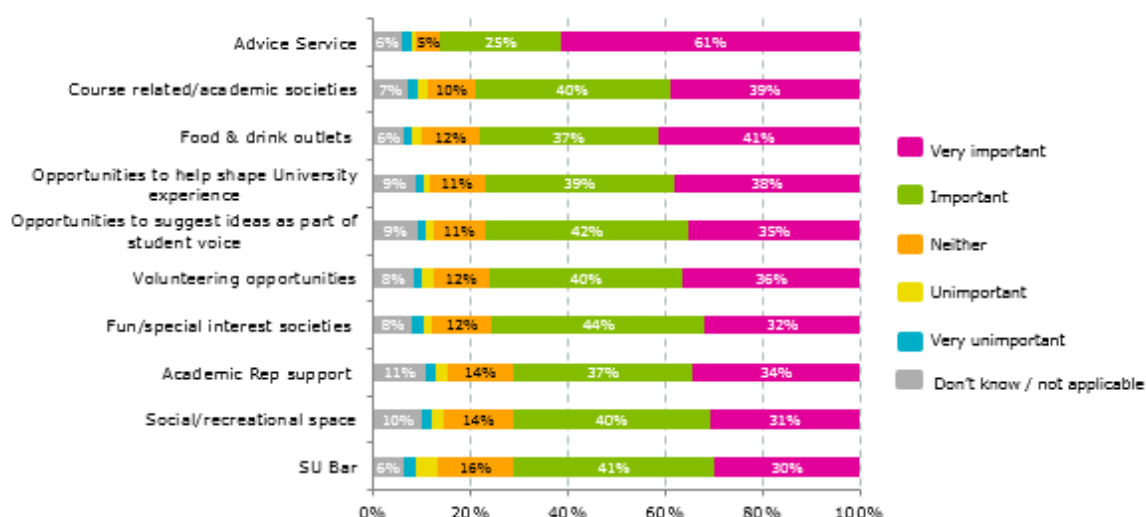
D4. Thinking about the areas you may have heard about, how satisfied, if at all, are you with the following services or functions provided by Edge Hill Students' Union?

nus
national union of students

However, when students were asked which service and facility is most important to them they stated advice services (61% said this was very important) and course related/academic societies (39% said very important). This indicated that whilst students value the importance of the membership services over the commercial services, they are most satisfied with the commercial offering, reiterating the need for EHSU to improve awareness and understanding of their membership services through clear communications.

Figure 37: Students online survey. Importance of services and facilities

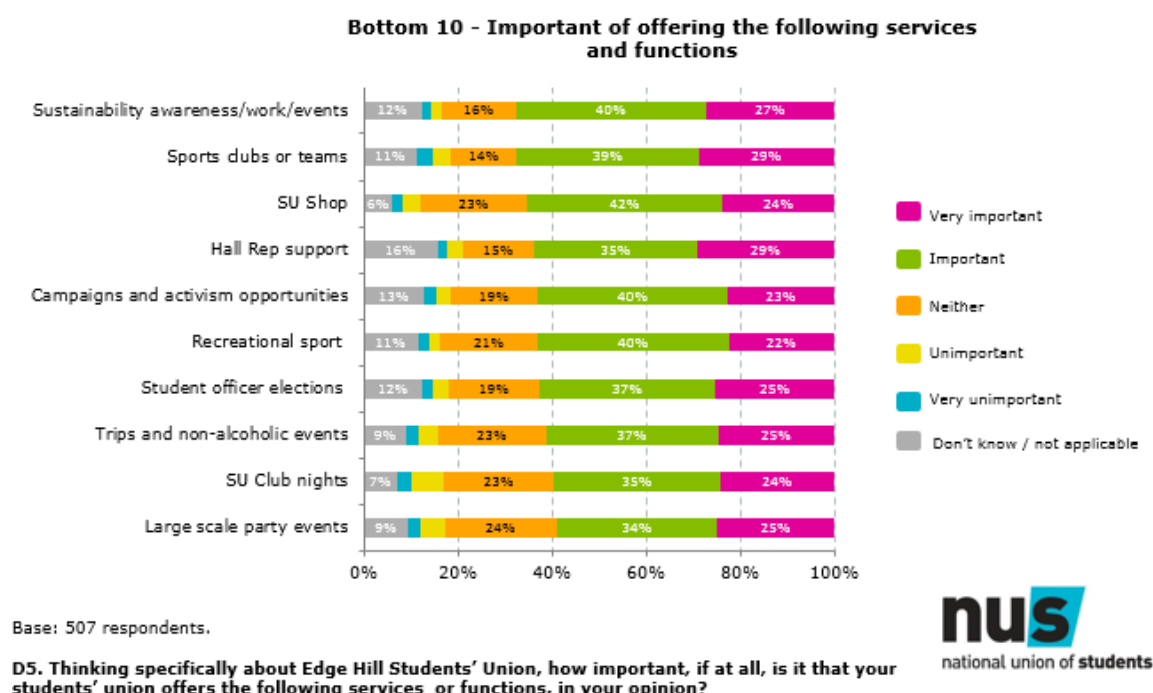
Top 10 - Important of offering the following services and functions



Base: 507 respondents.

D5. Thinking specifically about Edge Hill Students' Union, how important, if at all, is it that your students' union offers the following services or functions, in your opinion?

nus
national union of students



Institution stakeholder's perspective

Stakeholders expressed their concerns around the sporting facilities, it was highlighted that a vast amount of funds went towards the sports centre however the league table positions haven't improved. Not only this, but students stated they have experienced difficulties using the facilities because of timetable clashes with other sport teams. To utilise these facilities and enhance the student experience there could be a bigger focus on getting more students involved in sporting activities and team.

Figure 38: Students focus group. Issue with sporting

"The SU as well they took over the sporting teams, so like team HL used to be owned by the sports centre but then the SU took it back, I don't know why. But the only problem with that is we've less money now, and like the money is sort of not being I don't know, like we had more money when we were with, obviously they're an outside company and then there was issues with the sports teams trying to get training on campus, because there is a middle of the running track, the sports teams weren't allowed to use it but it's for the students and the students aren't allowed to use their own facilities which is a bit daft."

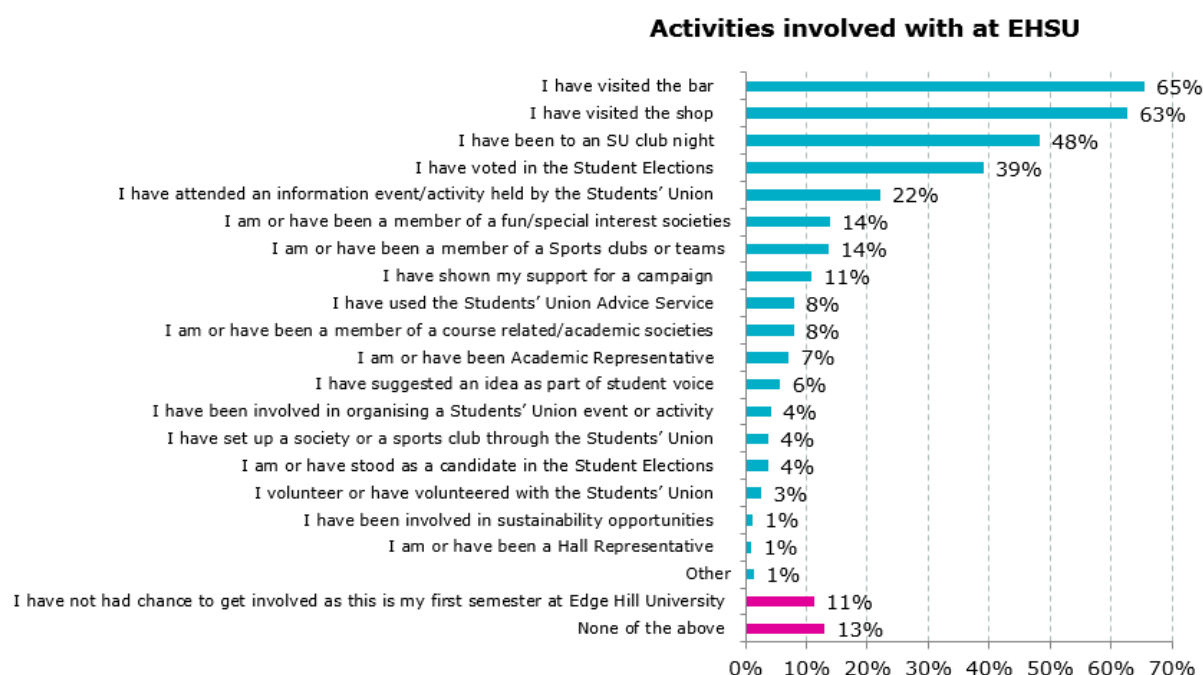
Current involvement with Edge Hill Students' Union

Although the majority of students are involved with EHSU, 1 in 4 say they haven't taken part in any activities with EHSU, showing a gap of engagement between students and the SU. The most common engagement with the SU is through visiting the bar and the shop with almost 2 in 3 doing both.

A promising two fifths (39%) of respondents have voted in the student elections, however, focus group participants stated that although they generally know about voting, they have concerns about knowing how to vote, as well as a lack of understanding of what the elected officers want to achieve during their time in post.

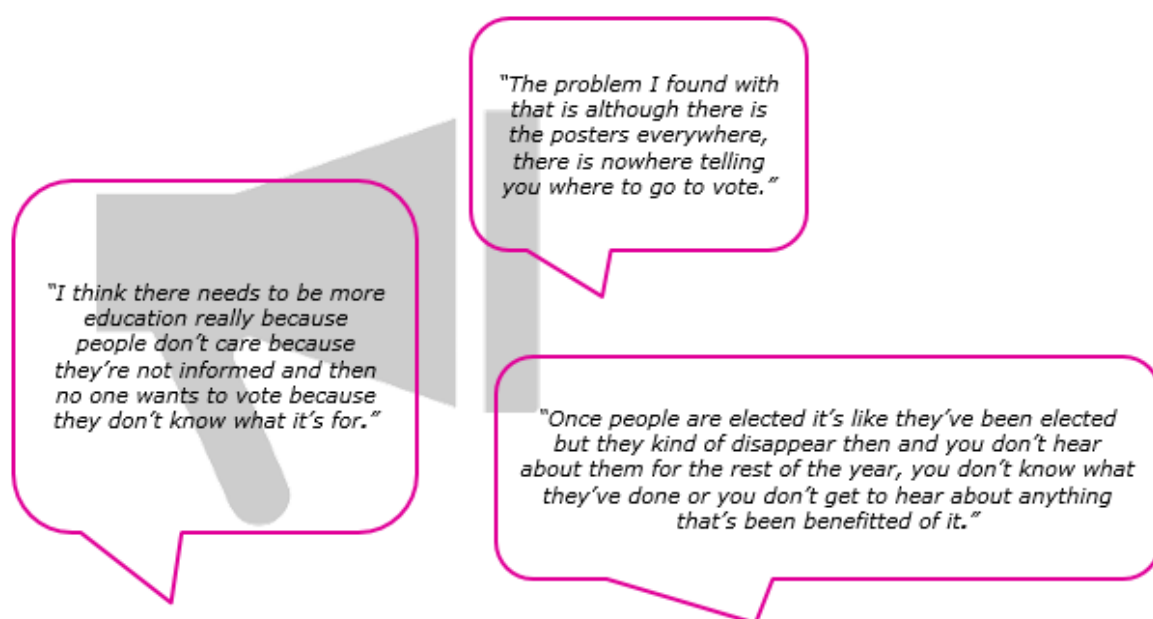
Just 14% are or have been a member of a sports club or team, which links to the institution stakeholder concerns around BUCS Leagues. It was mentioned by a couple of the stakeholders that there has been a large investment in sporting facilities at EH and they don't feel the facilities are being utilised fully. They want a focus on building the quality of the sports teams and hope to see this reflected in the position of EH within the BUCS Leagues.

Figure 39: Student online survey. Activities involved with at EHSU

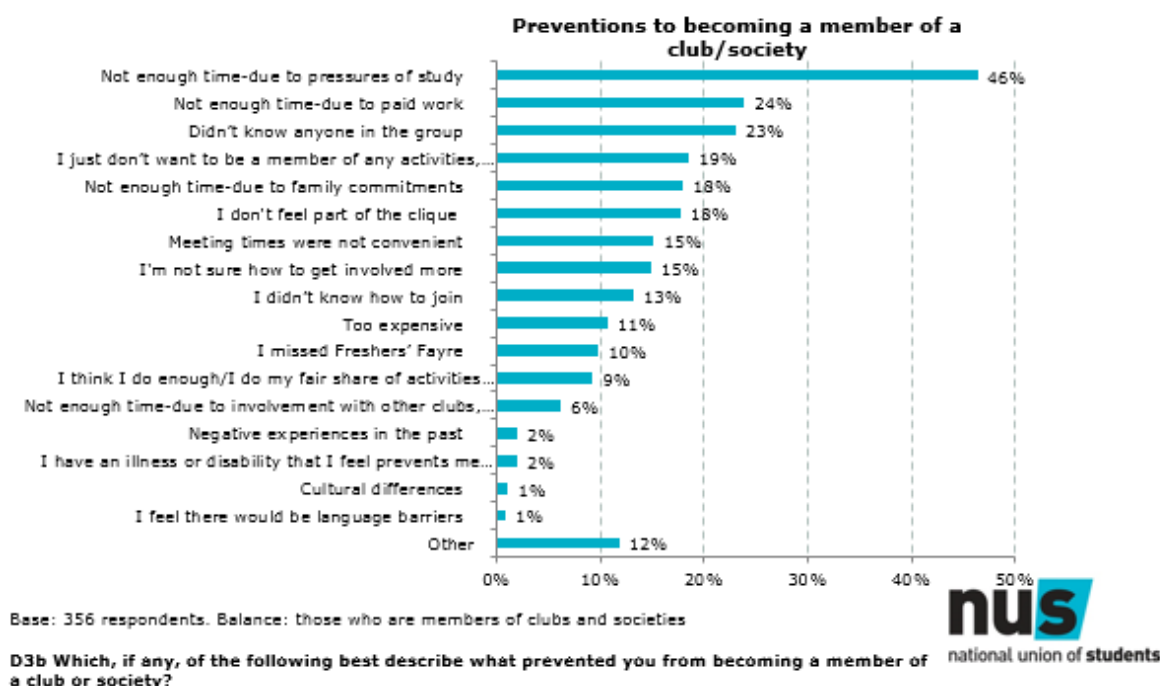


Base: 507 respondents.

D3a Which, if any, of the following activities have you ever been involved in at your students' union?

Figure 40: Students focus group. Voting

In order to gain an understanding on why students don't participate in a club or society, those students who are not members were asked to best describe what prevents them from joining. The main reasons were time constraints with almost half (46%) saying they don't have enough time due to the pressure of studies, a quarter (24%) specified they don't have enough time due to paid work, whilst 23% said it was because they don't know anyone.

Figure 41: Student online survey. Preventions to becoming a member of a club/society.

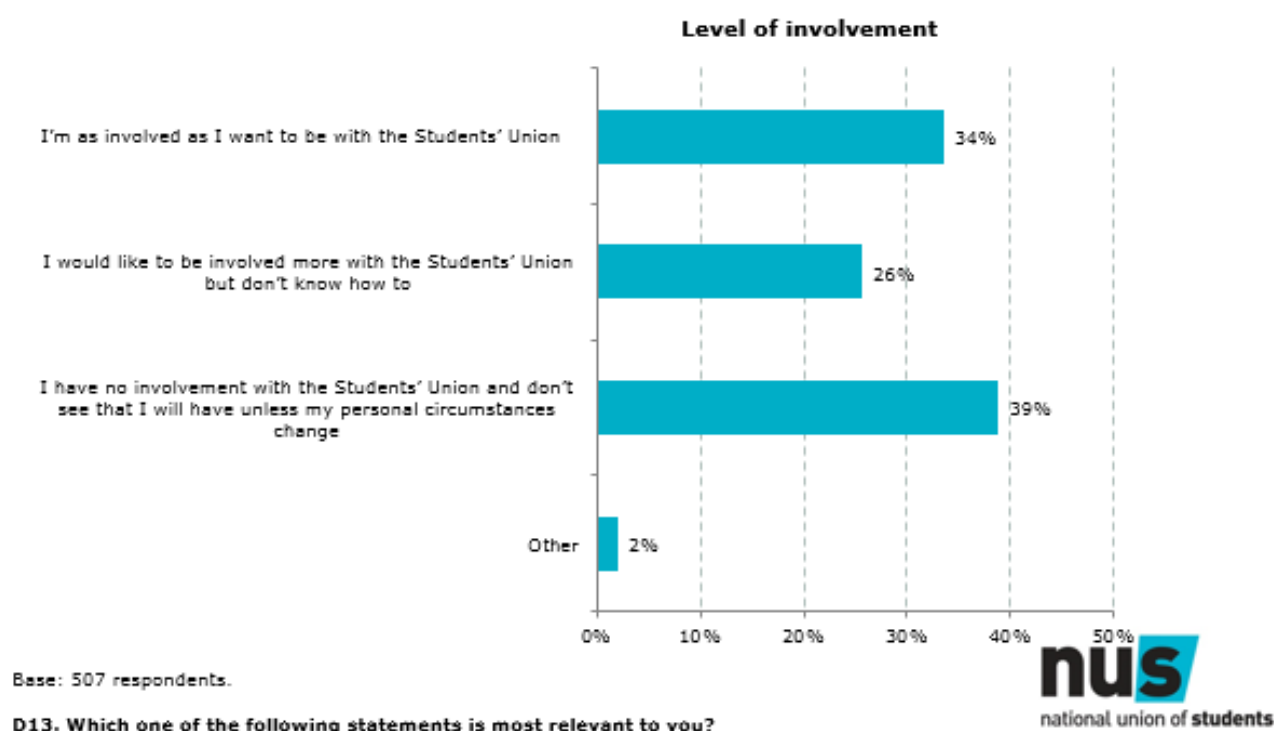
Increasing involvement

2 in 5 students say they aren't involved with the SU and don't see it changing, showing a large group who don't think they are actively involved with the SU. Engaging these presents a challenge as they don't see the SU as relevant to them and their current requirements.

On the other hand over a quarter of students would like to be involved more with the SU but aren't sure how to be, so there is a big opportunity to reach these students and help them engage with the SU and everything it offers.

Finally, a third are as involved as they want to be, so it's a case of continuing engagement with students who are already a part of the SU and are happy with it.

Figure 42: Students online survey. Level of involvement.



Students who participated in the focus group stated that they wish to gain a better understanding of what EHSU does and what it's there for and for it to be more inclusive. It is felt that EH focusses their attention on first years and those students who are based on campus. The desire is for the SU to increase the offering for the 'non-typical' student.

Even though the commercial services scored highly in terms of student satisfaction there are still areas to be improved. Although survey respondents were generally happy with the food and drink areas of the SU, focus group participants expressed concerns regarding the price and quality of the food provided by the SU. Similarly, the SU social venues faced criticism for both the price and facilities provided.

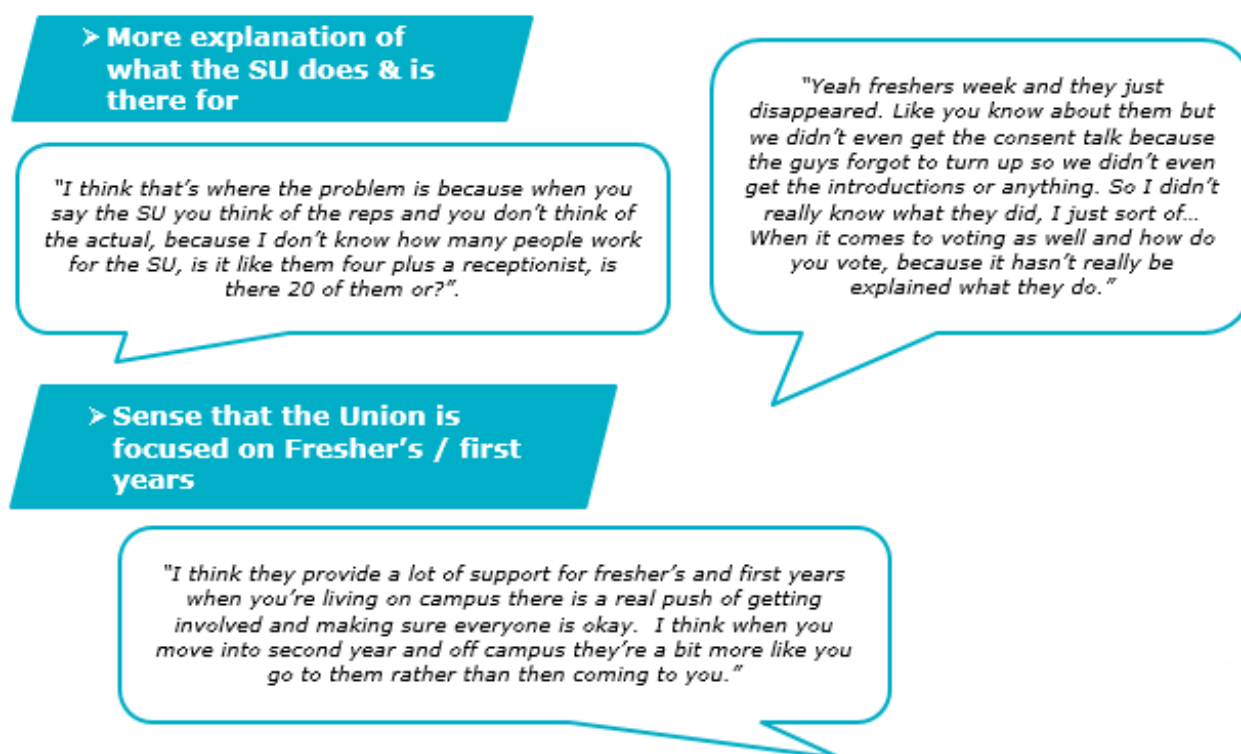
There is a wish for events that aren't just aimed at the 'typical student' but are more inclusive to all; suggestions included non-alcoholic events, weekend events – events that are more varied, flexible and

accessible. This may be more of an awareness and communication issue as a fifth of students in the survey weren't aware of trips and non-alcoholic events.

Students also expressed they would like to see more support around housing, with students expressing their concerns about getting 'ripped off' by estate agents due to them having never bought a house before and not fully understanding the contract.

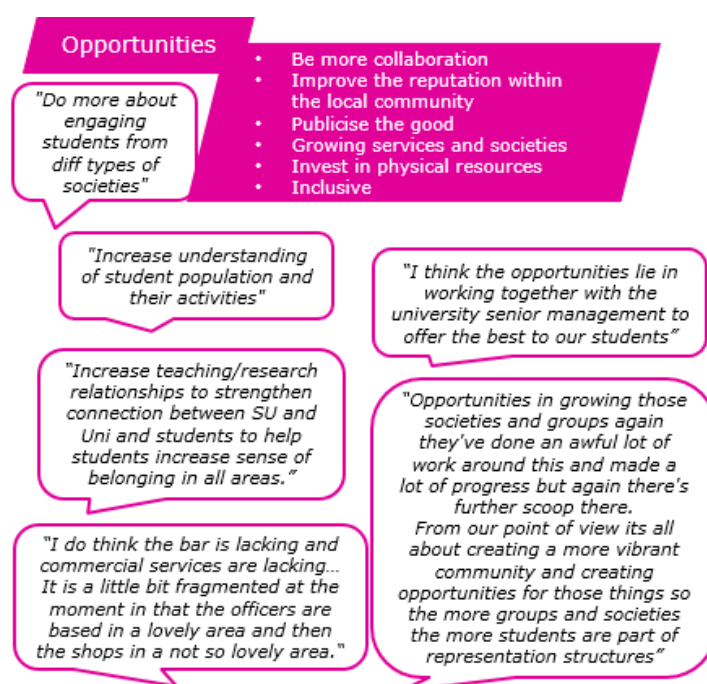
Figure 43: Students focus group. What students would like to see at the SU.





Institution stakeholders agreed with students and discussed the possibility of increasing different types of societies which they think will help create a more vibrant community and increase the opportunity for more students to join groups and societies, leading to more students being represented.

Figure 44: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Opportunities



SU staff deem that talking to students and having better forms of communication should increase engagement with students. Having more accessible and varied events are considered to be ways they could increase the numbers of students involved.

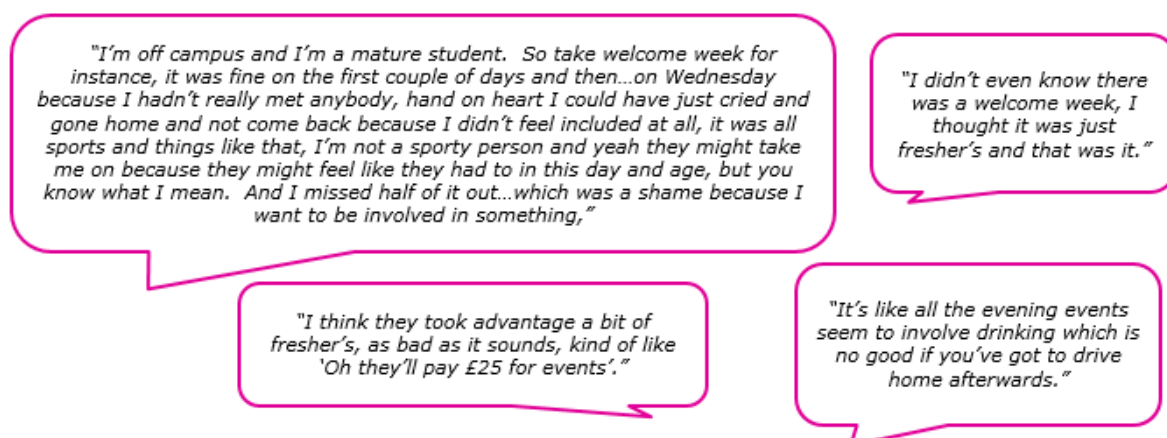
Figure 45: SU staff online survey. Ways to engage with students



Involvement from the beginning

Fresher's week is a period of time to welcome all students to EHU, it is a great opportunity to inform new and existing students about EHSU by telling them about the services and facilities, both commercial and non-commercial, as well as educating students on the role of the SU and what the elected officers are doing. However Fresher's week didn't seem to resonate with some of the respondents, with some students feeling excluded because they are not a 'typical' fresher, some feel that it is not relevant to them because they are not a first year students and others raised questions about the prices of the events.

Figure 46: Student focus group. Fresher's week



5.2 Collaboration

Relationship with institution stakeholders

One thing that was clear, was that the University staff believe that the SU and the University are working towards a shared goal of making the student experience as good as possible, so the main theme was that they should work together where possible and appropriate to achieve this goal. Many of the institution stakeholders talk about having an open door policy with the SU team and believe they have a good relationship and work well together. These stakeholders were happy with how they work with the SU team and want to see it continue.

However, many mentioned specific ways in which they'd like to do or see more collaboration between themselves and the SU staff. For some this was as simple as inviting the institution team to see more of what happens e.g. tours around campus/SU buildings, more chances to meet the SU staff and officers and opportunities to meet students around the SU space. For others it was more specific:

- Identifying commercial opportunities and developments
- Working together on planning permission from local authorities
- Working with private landlords to improve the quality of the properties rented to students. Particularly improving the exterior, e.g. gardens and the front building fascia, would please local residents, thus in turn improving the student relationships/perceptions with local community
- Bringing more defined focus to extra-curricular activities, demonstrating to students and helping them demonstrate how these extra-curricular activities can improve their employability
- Build on academic opportunities, such as encouraging and helping students with study abroad programmes
- Share data and ideas/opportunities that are highlighted through this survey

For others, it was more about the SU team challenging the institution teams by asking more questions, asking more of them, going to them for more support on specific things and being bold in utilising their expertise. They want you to make use of the open door policy and the experts that sit in these rooms – go to them and seek support or collaboration whenever you can. The ball is in your court to seek support when you need it.

Relationship with the local community

The local community has an impact on the lives of students at EH and vice versa, and this relationship between the University as a whole and the local community was brought up by a few institution stakeholders and a student from the focus group. Institution stakeholders stated that the local community consists mainly of middle class, fairly senior citizens who present a stark contrast to the students, creating tensions between "town and gown". They feel it is important to lower these tensions as its important students and the community live and work in harmony.

Institution stakeholders suggested the opportunity to publicise and increase the awareness of the benefits the SU and students have for the local community. They want to promote the good acts students do, such as society events and charity drives, as well as promoting the ways in which the University student's facilities are good for the local economy. They believe that more focus on the good stories will increase learning and development and in turn, help grow these relations and lower tensions.

Institution stakeholders also mentioned that promoting and publicising the contribution for both what the students and the SU does for the local community via local and national press, will help improve the perceptions of students on a wider level. They speak about the challenges students, the University and the SU face with the bad press surrounding students and suggest that a focus on taking the good stories further could help EH student reputation and employability.

5.3 Priorities

Suggested top priorities

Within the tele-depth interviews institution stakeholders expressed their thoughts around what they believe the SU senior managers top priorities should be. Figure 47 illustrates that supporting students, representing students and student engagement are the top three priorities. Understanding students and improving communications were also mentioned as a priority.

The institution stakeholders were very positive about EHSU recognising the big journey that the team has been on. However, some perceived the SU to be too ambitious saying things such as; “better to have limited numbers of objectives and achieve those objectives.” “Get the basics right first and work within your limitations. Have aspirations but we can’t be Manchester Uni union...we have to focus on what we can achieve” indicating that they believe the priorities should be specific, realistic and attainable.

SU staff had similar thoughts to the institution stakeholders and ensuring students are the key focus should be top priority, however they also believe that commercial aspects such as promoting and developing the SU should be an area of focus.

Figure 47: Institution stakeholder’s tele-depth interviews. Top 3 priorities

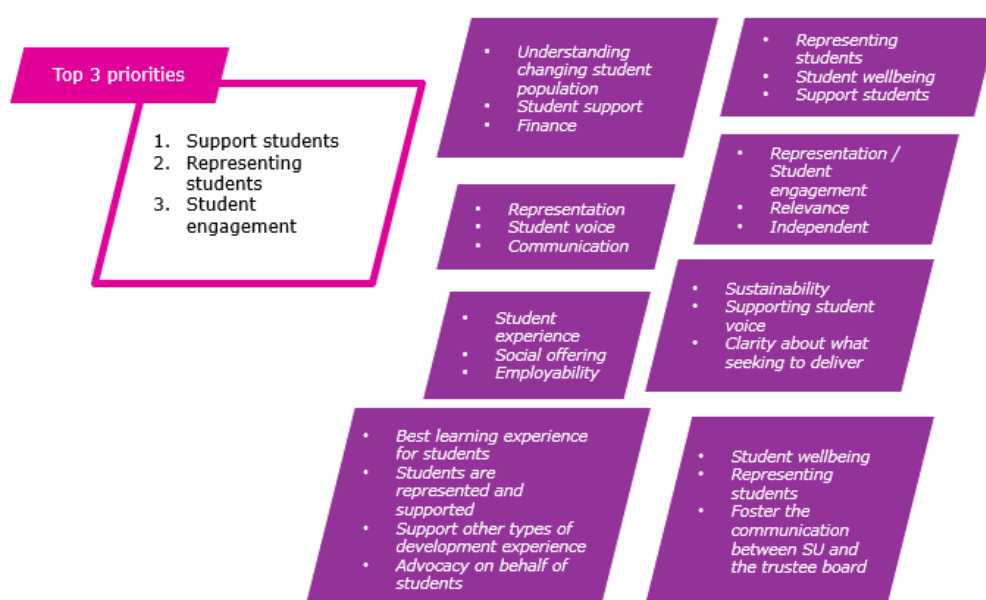


Figure 48: SU staff online survey. Top 3 areas of focus



6.0 Communication

Objective 3:

- ✎ **There is a feeling that better student communications would be a great starting point and this topic should be explored in detail**

This section explores student and institution stakeholder overall thoughts on communication and digital engagement. This section examines the effectiveness of communication methods, evaluates the content and provides discussion around the frequency of receiving communications.

Communication was a major part of discussion with both students, institution stakeholders and staff, with all feeling that it's a vital aspect to focus on and many improvements are suggested. Many spoke about the effectiveness of social media, the need for clear messages about what's going on at the SU in terms of events and more generally, plus what the communication content should include and how often it should be sent.

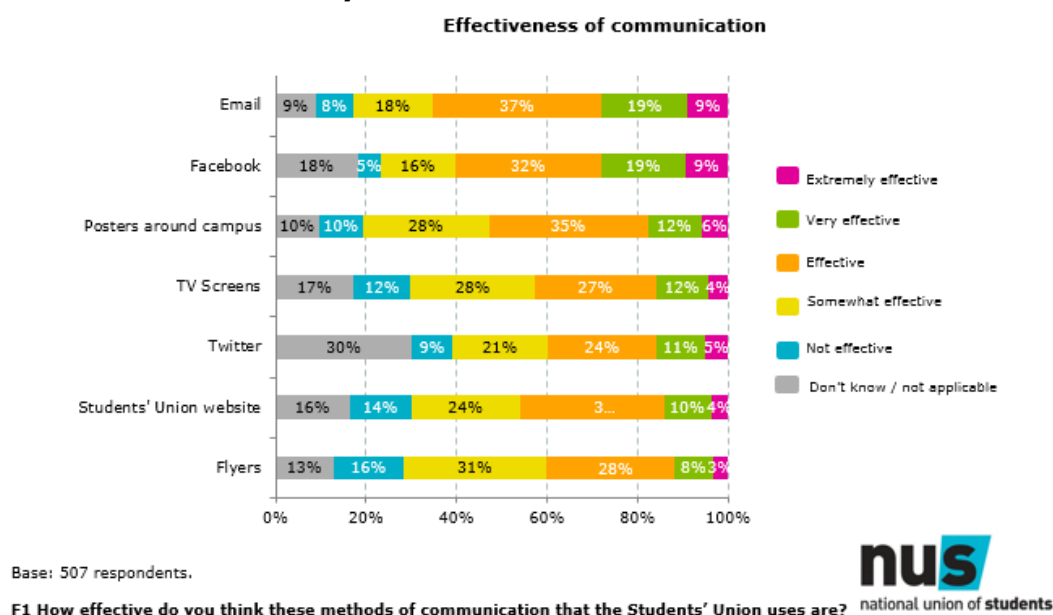
6.1 Methods of communication

Current communication channels and their effectiveness

Student's perspective

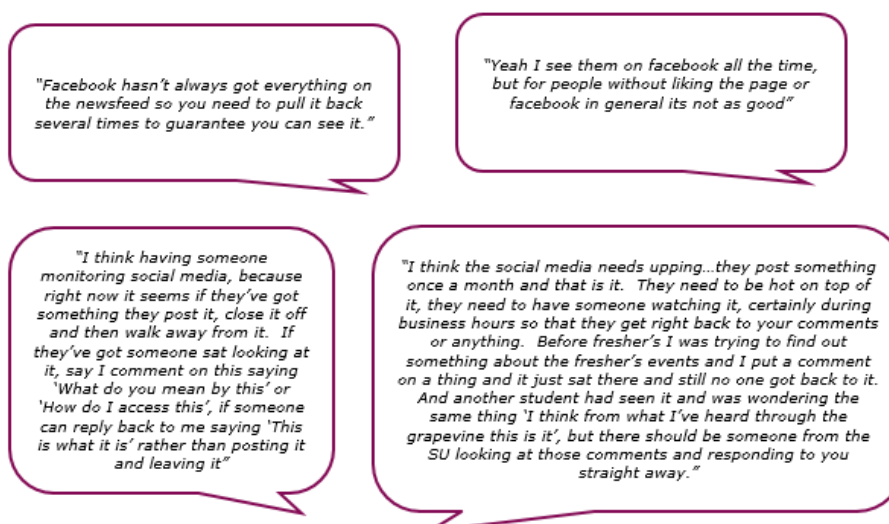
EHSU currently use a range of communication channels to connect with their students, these being; social media, emails, posters, flyers, TV adverts and the website. Students expressed their thoughts on the effectiveness of the communication channels through the online survey and focus groups.

Those who completed the online survey specified that email is the most effective method of communication however just 28% say it is extremely/very effective. Facebook and posters around the campus come second and flyers are believed to be the least effective method of communication the SU uses with only one in ten (11%) saying they are effective.

Figure 49: Students online survey. Effectiveness of communication.

Students who participated in the focus group had mixed opinions regarding social media. They expressed their concerns regarding Facebook and felt that it isn't always the best platform to communicate information, often they have to scroll on the Facebook page to find the relevant information and questions asked by students don't always get answered.

Ways to combat this were discussed and focus group participants suggested posting relevant information on a regular basis which means the users don't have to scroll and the page should be monitored regularly to answer any questions the students might have.

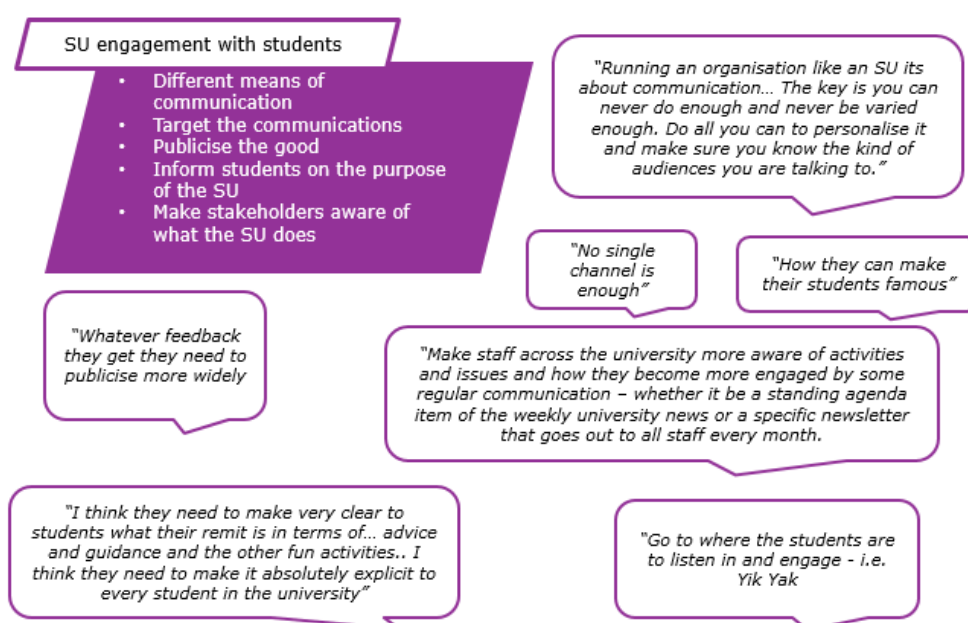
Figure 50: Students focus group. Thoughts on social media.

Institution stakeholder's perspective

Institution stakeholders state the importance of the different means of communication and not to just use one single channel. They recognise the importance of communication and believe that communication should be utilised to increase the awareness of the SU activities and events to both them and students.

Overall institution stakeholders wanted a consistent approach which had the same communication across different channels so that students could find the necessary information and wouldn't miss anything important.

Figure 51: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. SU engagement with students.



Content within the communication

Student's perspective

Students were then asked to rate the communication content they had seen from EHSU. 61% said that the language used was good and 52% thought the quality of the content was good, however only 38% felt that the content was relevant to them. Following this we asked the students to indicate how they would like the content to be tailored to them, two fifths (41%) said they would like the content to be tailored to their course/academic school and just under a third (31%) said to their lifestyle and interests. Those students who live in halls on campus are significantly more likely to say they would like the communications tailored to their lifestyle and interests compared to students living in other accommodation arrangements.

Focus group participants had similar thoughts, they felt that the communication isn't always relevant to them, nor inclusive to all. It was touched upon that the information isn't always informative and that there is not enough coverage on what is happening.

Figure 52: Student focus group. Current communication methods

Focus group participants went on to describe the content they desire from the communications they receive, specifying the following approaches and content:

- Targeting the communication
- Personalising content so it is more appealing to the end user
- Increasing awareness of what the SU are campaigning for/against
- A calendar of events
- Weekly newsletters
- Promoting the website more
- Linking the website to society social media pages

- Making clear what the societies are, how you join them and who to contact

Figure 53: Students focus group. Improvements on communication channels and content.

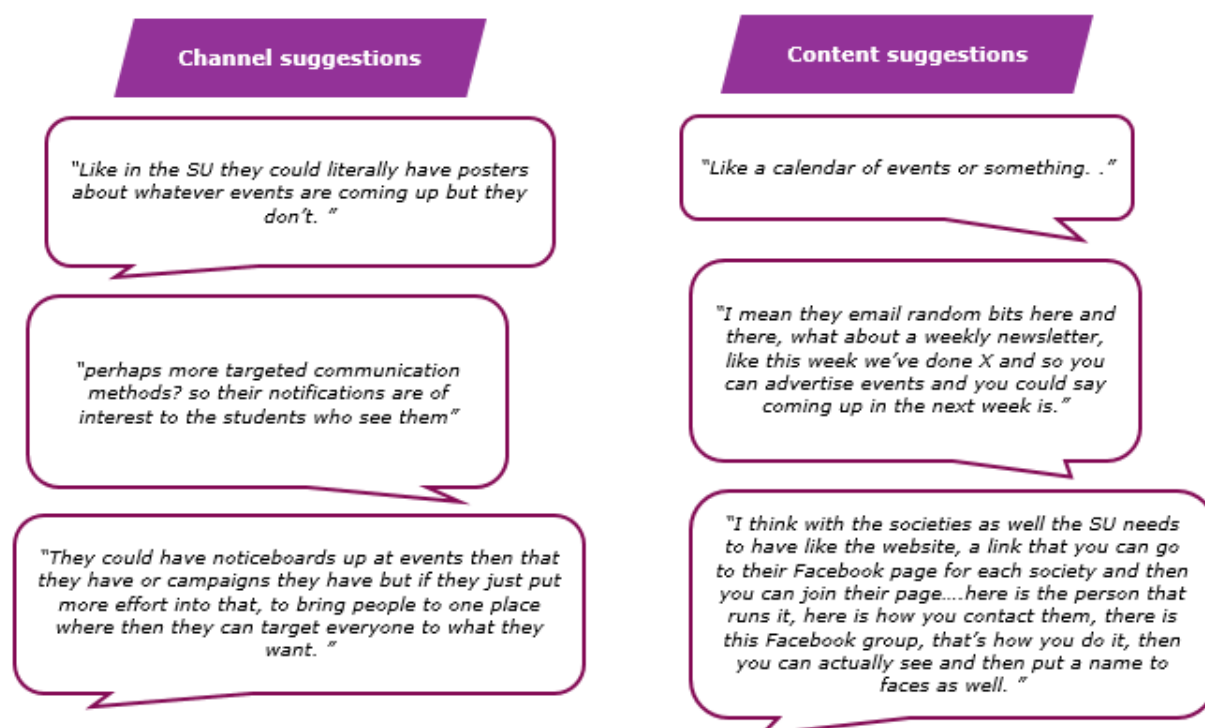
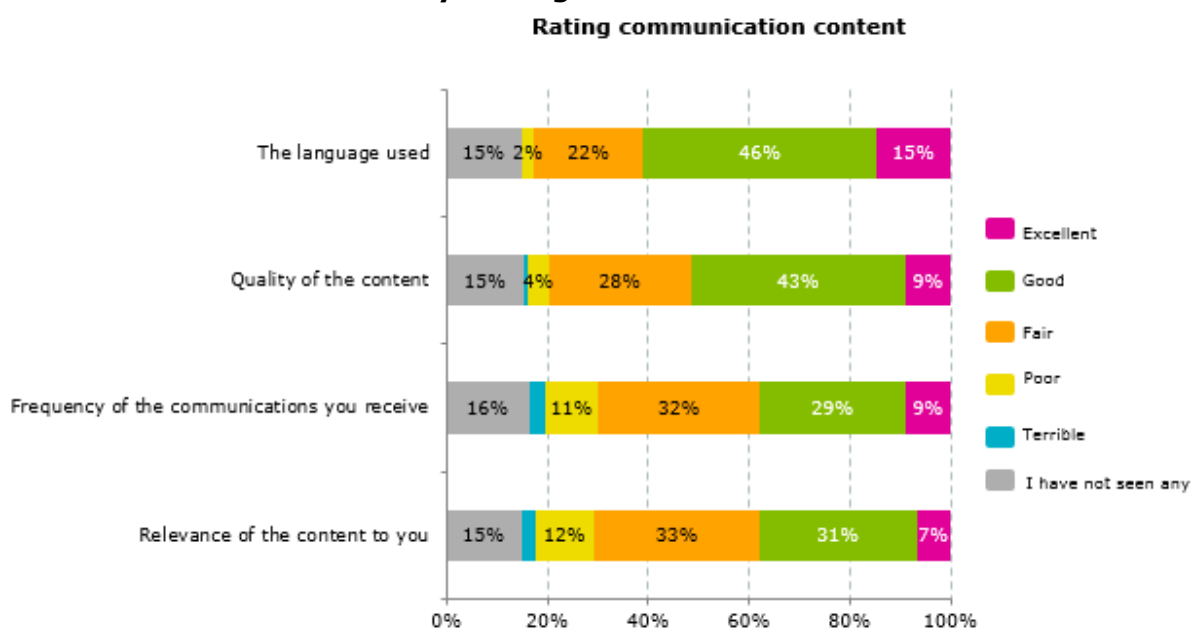
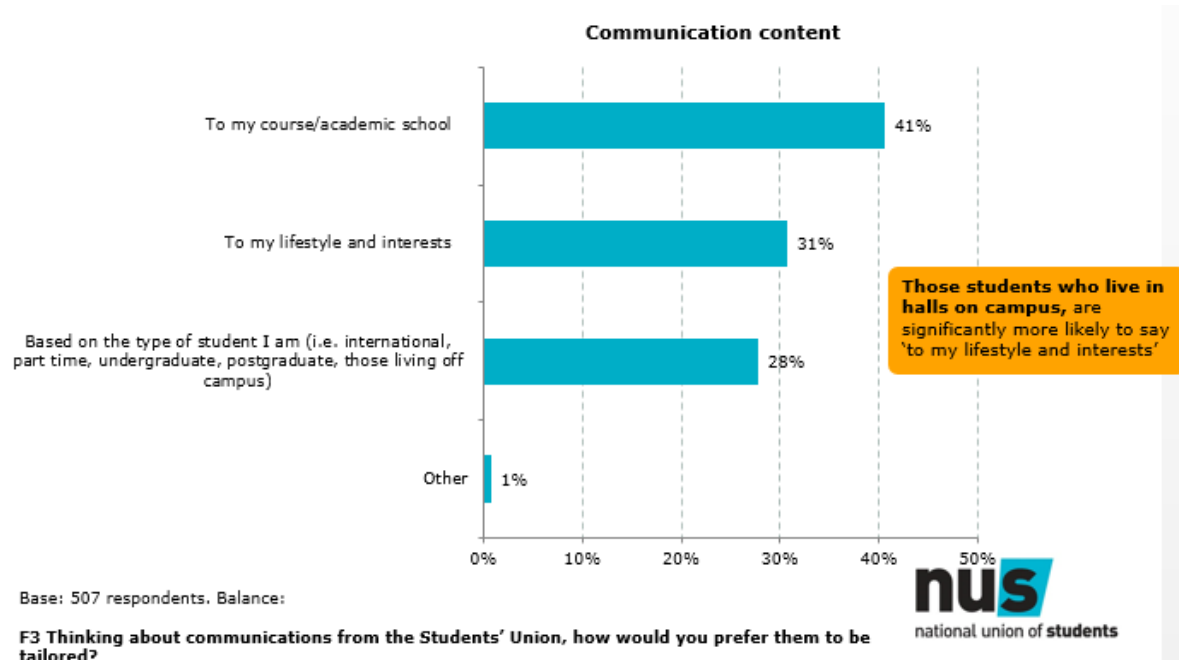


Figure 54: Students online survey. Rating communication content.



Base: 507 respondents.

F2. Now thinking about any of the communications you have seen from Edge Hill Students' Union overall, how would you rate the following elements?

Figure 55: Students online survey. Desired communication content.

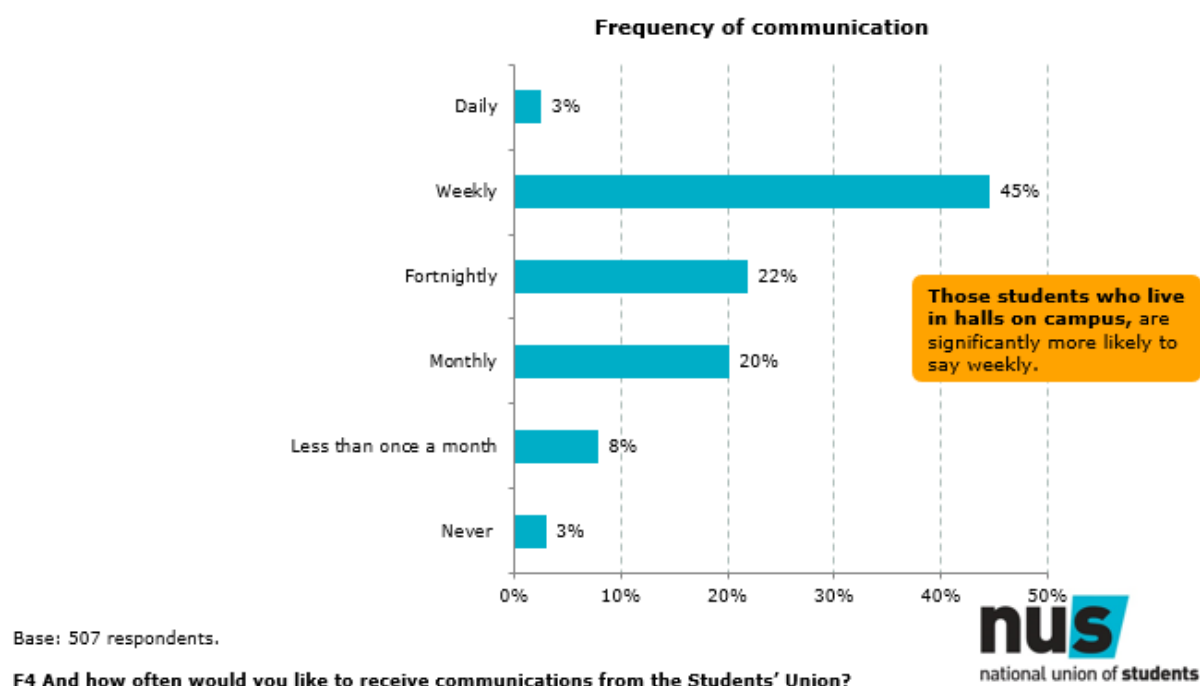
Institution stakeholder's perspective

Institution stakeholders had similar thoughts to the students in terms of making the communications more personalised and targeted. They believe that ensuring that the SU fully understands the audience they are talking to so the content is specific and relevant.

Frequency of distribution

Student's perspective

There were concerns about the email system as some focus group participants highlighted that they don't receive any forms of communication from the SU, whereas others felt they were being spammed. Over two fifths (45%) of students said they would like to hear from EHSU weekly, with those who live in halls on campus significantly more likely to say this.

Figure 56: Students online survey. Desired frequency of communication.

Institution stakeholder's perspective

Institution stakeholders discussed the issue that students often receive a mass of emails and have constant interactions and distractions throughout their lives, so stressed the importance to “think about the quality not the quantity of the communications”.

6.2 Digital engagement

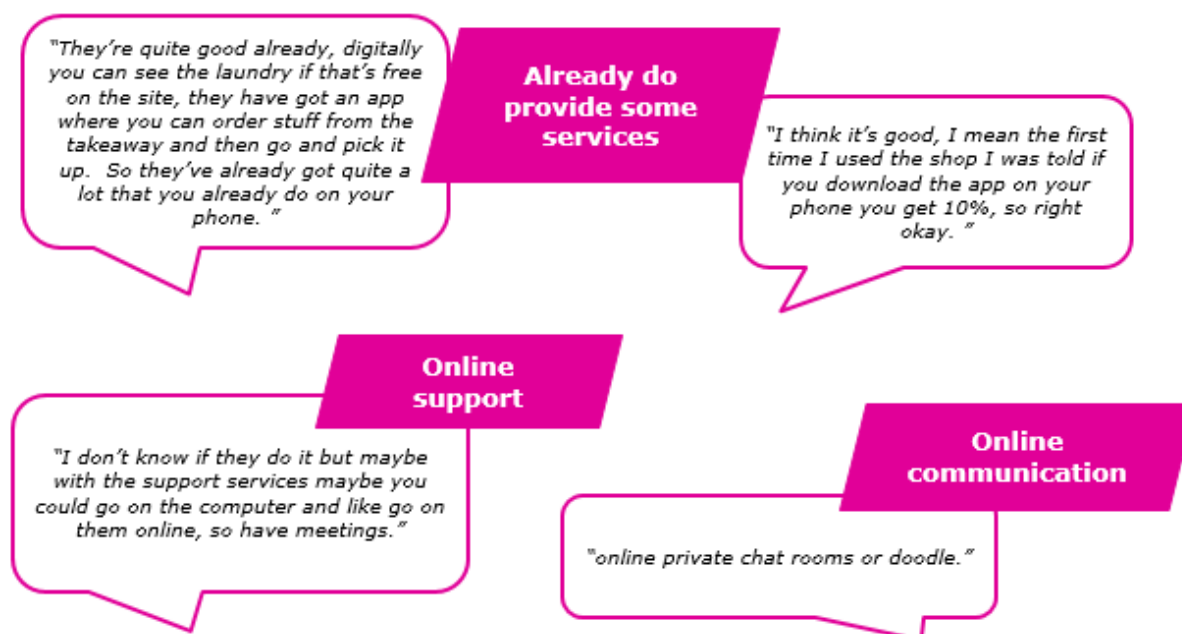
New digital engagement methods

It became apparent that both students, SU staff and institution stakeholders found it difficult to answer the questions around digital engagement, as many participants had to be prompted or were unable to answer the questions.

Student's perspective

Students identified that EHSU are already providing some services digitally such as the availability of the laundry service and an app for the shop, however not all respondents were aware of these so further communications around this may increase use. There were a number of new digital engagement methods were suggested by a few, these being:

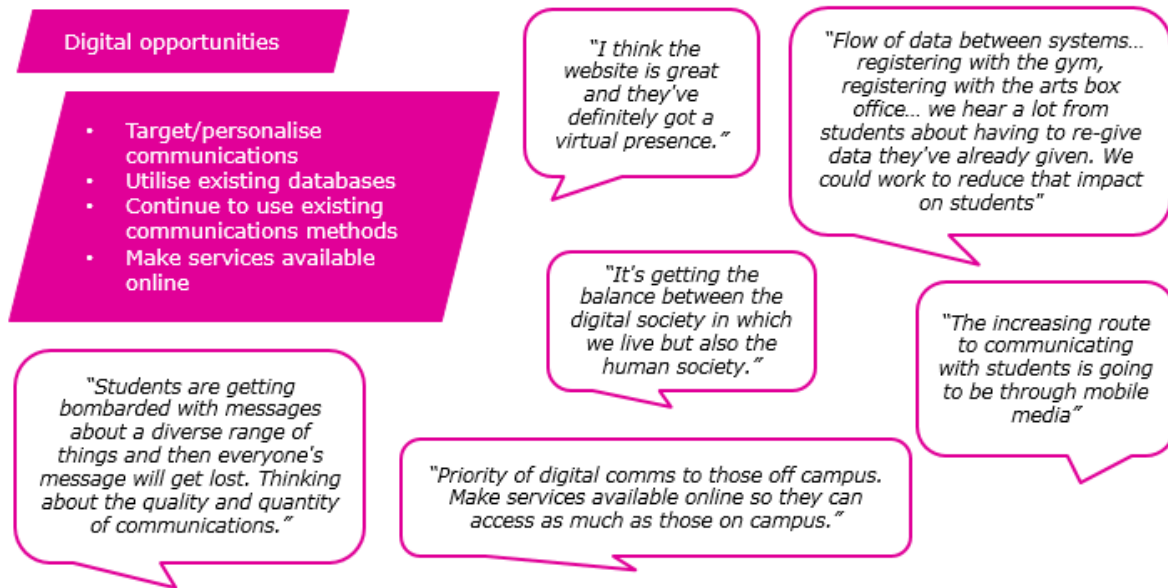
- Online support group – this will make support more accessible to those students who aren't based on the campus
- Online community (chat rooms, doodle) – students will be able to discuss issues relating to them

Figure 57: Student focus group. Digital opportunities.

Institution stakeholder's perspective

Stakeholders struggled to specifically suggest digital services and engagement, mainly focusing on communication via social media and emails. However some suggestions made were:

- Make services available online so those students off-campus can access the SU services
- Utilise existing databases
- Ensure there is a balance between a digital society and human society – continue to speak to students face to face
- Continue to utilise existing communication methods – the website gives the SU a virtual presence

Figure 58: Institution stakeholder's tele-depth interviews. Digital opportunities.

Similar to institution stakeholder's, SU staff recognise there is an opportunity via the means of social media and believe that face to face communication should be continued. Notice ahead of events is also seen to be a method that could be better communicated, increasing the awareness will hopefully lead to an increase in attendees.

Figure 59: SU staff online survey. Digital opportunities.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations

While EHSU is perceived in a positive manner, and students at EH are considered generally to be positive, a variety of challenges and opportunities were highlighted throughout the report. This last section offers some conclusions, leading to a number of suggestions and recommendations based on the findings presented.

Reputation – conclusion

Students are generally satisfied with their time at EHU. The atmosphere, environment and reputation all have a positive effect on the students.

Students identified the SU to be a place that supports them and represents their needs, however some feel that the SU isn't as inclusive as it could be and the desire to include those students who don't feel like a typical student is key.

It has become apparent that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the services and facilities the SU offers and the need for this to be promoted and advertised is fundamental to the SU success and growth.

Reputation – recommendation

- Educate students, SU staff and institution stakeholders on the role of EHSU
- Inform students and institution stakeholders of the services and facilities that EHSU offer
- Increase the awareness of who the elected officers are and what they do
- Signpost and direct students to the SU and contacts within the SU so that they know who can help with specific issues
- Provide recognition to the students who are doing positive work within the local community
- Promote the benefits of the SU and the value it has on individuals

Future of EHSU – conclusion

Students identified the importance of the membership services (particularly the advice service) but they don't necessarily use these services. The commercial facilities are more widely used by EH students.

A proportion of students would like to be more involved with the SU but again don't necessarily know how to do this.

Institution stakeholders reiterated their open door policy and willingness to be involved with the SU, emphasising the shared goals with the possibility of working with the University and utilising their expertise.

SU staff and institution stakeholders discussed the future of EHSU and the areas in which they should focus on. Many institution stakeholders wanted the priority to be getting the basics completely right, before setting bigger targets, the basics being:

- Supporting students
- Representing student

- Engaging students

Future of EHSU – recommendation

- Work with the institution stakeholders to form a partnership that will promote sharing of expertise, data and knowledge
- Organise and run varied events that are appealing to those students who consider themselves not to be a typical student i.e. non-alcoholic events, weekend events, day time events, day trips to tourist locations
- Ensure sufficient support for the upcoming elected officers to effectively manage the transition of officers
- Consider organising and/or subsidising travel services to make events more accessible to those students who don't live on campus
- Run workshops and advice services on issues that are top of mind for students such as mental health awareness and support, financial advice and housing support
- Showcase the variety of sport teams and facilities that are available at EH to increase the number of students using the sporting facilities and in turn this should help to improve success in BUCS Leagues
- Educate students on the employability services that already exist, this could range from offering skills workshops and tips, to actually helping them to find a job.
- Encourage societies, volunteers and teams to work with the local community to help improve relations.

Communication – conclusion

Communication both internally and externally is imperative to EHSU. Students and institution stakeholders feel they lack the awareness of what EHSU does and the services the SU provides. Improving the communication should develop the relationships and provide students and institution stakeholders with the necessary information they need regarding the SU.

Institution stakeholders want to hear from EHSU on a regular basis to help them keep up-to-date with what the SU is working on and if there is anything the University can help them with.

From students there was a mixed opinion regarding communication with some receiving regular updates and others none. Students want...

- Weekly updates
- Content that applies to them
- A variety of channels that are kept up-to-date

Communication - recommendation

- Distribute the communication to students on a weekly basis
- Use a variety of communication methods but ensure they are used strategically and effectively
- Target personalised communications methods to students where possible
- Promote the event calendar so that students are aware of what is happening and when, including details of the social events and ticketing
- Publicise the commercial deals and offers across the SU shop and events
- Communicate what EHSU is campaigning for
- Promote how great the students are to the local and national press – make the students famous!

- Talk to the institution stakeholders on a regular basis and build rapport
- Encourage students to utilise the ideas section on the website
- Promote facilities for students to contact officers or SU staff online regarding personal issues

