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STUDENTS'  
UNION



# STUDENT VOICE REPORT

**THE POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT  
STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

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## **Foreword**

The postgraduate taught degree, sometimes referred to as a Master's, has been a hot topic of discussion across higher education in recent years.

Nationally, Students' Unions have been seen as undergraduate-focused organisations and Royal Holloway is not an exception to this view. Most elected leaders and other representative roles here are typically held by undergraduate students, and we have not had direct sight of some of the issues negatively affecting postgraduate taught students. The launch of the Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Policy Inquiry in 2022 and the introduction of a Postgraduate Taught Community Officer in 2023 were the first steps the Students' Union took to better understand the postgraduate taught experience at Royal Holloway.

This Student Voice Report investigates this unique experience over a single academic year in 2022-23. It examines what it is like to be a postgraduate taught student and shines a light on the different experiences of more marginalised groups at Royal Holloway like mature, international, part-time and commuter students as well as those who have caring responsibilities. The postgraduate taught degree is very different to the undergraduate degree—everything from the start date, workload and assessment, and students' expectations and relationship with the University and the Students' Union. Finally, the additional time pressure of having one year to create meaningful connections with other students to foster a real sense of belonging really separates the postgraduate taught experience from what undergraduates and postgraduate research students experience while studying for a longer period.

Our research has produced an extensive list of recommendations for the University and Students' Union to act upon with an aim to create meaningful, positive change for current and prospective postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway. I particularly find the recommendations around inductions and community building extremely important for this group. Inductions play a crucial role in helping students to create a sense of belonging and establish a strong community at the start of their degree. Unfortunately, I believe this is one area where we struggle to support postgraduate taught students, especially January starters. I also believe departments and Schools can do more to for this community by running more regular events and talks. I hope the recommendations and information obtained from this research is used by other universities and students' unions across the sector to improve the postgraduate taught student experience at their institution.

I want to thank Dr Elise Thornton for making this project come to life. This report has provided us with real insight into how postgraduate taught students feel and has given them a platform to voice issues that are affecting their time at Royal Holloway. I am incredibly excited to see the positive impact of this report in shaping the Students' Union's approach to building a stronger community for this group of students at Royal Holloway as well as creating more opportunities for meaningful connection and engagement at our postgraduate taught student events. I look forward to working collaboratively with the University to implement the recommendations to contribute to the overall success and the feeling of belonging for postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway.

Hannah Hockin (Students' Union President 2023-24)

## Executive Summary

In September 2022, the Students' Union launched a Policy Inquiry on the postgraduate taught student experience at Royal Holloway. This area of the student experience is currently experiencing a huge crisis within the higher education sector, and the Students' Union wanted to better understand the drivers of this community and learn more about students' positive and negative experiences of the degree while studying at Royal Holloway. The Students' Union tracked this area of the student experience for one full academic year from September 2022 to August 2023, and this Student Voice Report presents the results of our engagement with postgraduate taught students during this period. Policy Inquiries were created with an aim to bring about positive, long-lasting change for current and prospective students at Royal Holloway, and the Students' Union has compiled a list of recommendations centred around issues of key importance for this community of students with the hope that it makes student life better at Royal Holloway.

Below is a summarised list of recommendations, which can be found in full at the end of the document.

<b>1. The Postgraduate Taught Community</b>
1.1 Schools and departments should run more regular social events throughout the academic year for postgraduate taught students, and each School and department should review their annual budget and reserve funding for these social events.
1.2 Departments and Schools should review their annual budgets and reserve funding for students to run their own regular events throughout the academic year.
1.3 The Students' Union should host a greater number of events specifically for postgraduate taught students throughout the academic year.
1.4 The University, Schools, departments and the Students' Union should consider ways they can better engage with students who are primarily based at the London Campus in Bloomsbury.
1.5 The Students' Union should increase outreach on postgraduate taught issues and continue to offer support for postgraduate taught students.
1.6 The Students' Union should send a termly targeted email out to postgraduate taught students which reminds them of ways they can engage with their School Rep and postgraduate course rep to submit feedback to their departments about their experience at Royal Holloway.
1.7 The Students' Union should review the current level of participation among postgraduate taught students in our student groups, and further encourage ways to become more involved in our student groups. This recommendation aligns with recommendation 4.4.
1.8 The Students' Union should consider running a Buddy Scheme for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction periods.
1.9 The University should consider creating a Postgraduate Taught Student Hub on the main University website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App in a similar

vein to the Doctoral School website where postgraduate taught students could find all relevant information about their course in a single place.

## **2. Induction**

2.1 The University, Schools and departments should review its induction process for September and January starters, ensuring that the time and date of events are easily accessible and correct on the Royal Holloway main website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App.

2.2 The University, Schools and departments should review the induction material for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction period.

2.3 The University, Schools and departments should consider including an induction talk on Financial Advice for postgraduate taught students during both the September and January induction periods.

2.4 The University, Schools, departments and the Students' Union should consider ways of improving engagement with postgraduate taught students who are situated at the London Campus during the September and January induction periods.

2.5 The University, Schools and departments should review the induction process for January starters, and whether these postgraduate taught students are receiving the same information, support and guidance during their induction period as September starters.

2.6 The Students' Union should consider sending a targeted email to all January starters during their induction period which provides detailed information about the Students' Union, our Sabbatical Officers and student leaders, our services like the Advice Centre and food outlets and information about upcoming events.

## **3. Course Structure**

3.1 The University should clearly identify in each postgraduate course prospectus whether teaching for that course will occur at the Egham or London Campus. This information should be uploaded to the main Royal Holloway website by a set date each academic year.

3.2 The University should include a list of separate term dates for January starters on their main University website, the Student Intranet and the Royal Holloway App. This list of dates should include students' start date, teaching terms and the general dissertation deadlines for both January Models.

3.3 The University should include a clear explanation about the difference between the two January Models on their main website, the Student Intranet and the Royal Holloway App. A list of courses assigned to each Model should also be included for further clarification about the course structure.

## **4. Organisation**

4.1 The University should investigate whether the current timetabling software is fit for purpose and assess whether a better alternative may be available for use.

4.2 Schools and departments should review their timetable process and ensure postgraduate taught students receive their schedules before the start of term and that all information is accurate and up to date before teaching commences.

4.3 The University, Schools and departments should review whether block mode teaching is fit for purpose and the best course structure for postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway.

4.4 The University, Schools and departments should review the timetable structure for postgraduate taught students and whether they could benefit from the Wednesday afternoons off in a similar vein to undergraduate students which would allow them to participate in sports club events and other extracurricular opportunities.

## **5. Assessments**

5.1 Administration teams should generate an annual report scrutinising exam and assessment hand-in dates for postgraduate taught students to ensure clashes and deadline stacking is avoided within departments.

5.2 Schools and departments should ensure that postgraduate students receive their exam schedules by a set date to ensure students have enough time to prepare for the assessment.

5.3 Departments should review marking criteria and whether deadlines to return feedback to postgraduate students are consistent and being implemented correctly across all modules.

## **6. Careers & Employability**

6.1 The University Careers Service and departments should review their current provision of support and funding for postgraduate taught students and highlight gaps in their services.

6.2 Departments should conduct audits of their courses for postgraduate taught students and create a supporting document which outlines learned skills students should expect to gain while undertaking the course.

6.3 The University's Careers Service should implement a separate Career's Fair for postgraduate taught and research students.

6.4 Schools and departments should review their budgets and consider running smaller, coordinated careers events for postgraduate taught students throughout the academic year.

## **7. The Dissertation or the Final Project**

7.1 University should conduct a full review at the end of the 2023-24 academic year which examines the experience of January postgraduate taught students who underwent the Model 2 timeline. This review should consider whether students received information about the different structure of the course before enrolment, and whether submitting the dissertation before undertaking a second term of teaching was positively received by students.

## **Section A: The Context**

### A1. Overview

In May 2019 the Students' Union launched its very first Policy Inquiry into the postgraduate research experience because it was clear that we needed to better understand their needs as a community. Our engagement with postgraduate students was something we knew we needed to work on, and that project was a necessary first step to understanding the ways we could support student researchers and better represent their voice to the University to make impactful change on their experience. One year later, we published our first Student Voice Report which explained our findings from the project and included a list of substantial recommendations for the University, the newly created Doctoral School and the Students' Union. Our relationship and the way we engage with, and support, postgraduate research students has absolutely changed for the better since work completed on the project, and we have continued to explore new ways we can help improve their student experience at Royal Holloway.

It was always our intention to launch another Policy Inquiry into the postgraduate taught student experience because this is another underrepresented group at higher education institutes, including Royal Holloway, who feel routinely overlooked by their departments, university professional services and students' unions. Our previous work with postgraduate researchers revealed we could have a successful impact on the postgraduate experience at Royal Holloway and we were excited to see what we could do for postgraduate taught students. Unfortunately, this project waited in the wings for quite some time because the onset of the coronavirus pandemic delayed our work in this area. Much of our research work during the lockdown years focused on more reactive issues that impacted the entire student population at Royal Holloway, including postgraduate taught students, like the switch to remote learning and future of digital education, student housing, and improvements within University professional services like the Wellbeing Department. We also looked at student safety in our own late-night venues when students returned to campus and were able to attend events.

Since the 2021-22 academic year, Royal Holloway has slowly moved away from remote and hybrid learning and returned to in-person education, and the Students' Union decided in the summer months before the 2022-23 academic year that this project could no longer wait. There is a strong consensus among postgraduate taught students that there is a real lack of belonging within their departments and more social elements at universities run by the Students' Union in comparison to undergraduates. This feeling has only been exacerbated by recurring lockdowns during the pandemic, remote learning, ongoing industrial action, increasing financial pressures with the lack of available funding, rising fees and the cost-of-living crisis. These issues are very much rooted in the postgraduate taught experience at Royal Holloway and elsewhere. It is time students' unions and universities across the sector look inwards to learn more about the ways they are supporting this community of students while undertaking the postgraduate taught degree and publicly share good practice about the ways they can improve the student experience for this community. While the fundamental aim of our Policy Inquiries aligns with our motto as a Students' Union—to make student life better at Royal Holloway—we hope the findings of this project can help other institutions and students' unions in their own work for postgraduate taught students.

## A2. Postgraduate Taught Students at Royal Holloway

During the 2022-23 academic year, Royal Holloway had 1,764 students undertaking a postgraduate taught degree, representing nearly 14 per cent of the total student population that year. Throughout our Policy Inquiry we engaged with just under ten percent of the postgraduate taught population in each survey, and we knew that to truly gain insight about the experiences of this group we needed to understand more about the students currently studying at Royal Holloway. We emailed the University's Data Management team in June 2023 and asked for demographic information about postgraduate taught students who studied during our Policy Inquiry from September 2022 to August 2023. The tables below present this data and include 2023 January starters, students participating in a year of industry or continuing professional development, and part-time students or other postgraduate taught students who began their degrees any at any point before or after September 2022 who still had student status at Royal Holloway.

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by gender 2022-23 (1764)	
Male	Female
46.09	53.91

*Table 1: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by gender, June 2023*

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance 2022-23 (1764)			
Full time	Part Time	Cont. Professional Development	Industry Year Compulsory
92.29	6.29	0.96	0.45

*Table 2: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of attendance, June 2023*

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance and gender 2022-23 (1764)		
Mode of Attendance and numbers	Gender	
	Male	Female
Full Time (1628)	46.31	53.68
Part Time (111)	34.23	65.77
Continuing Professional Development (17)	88.23	11.76
Industry Year Compulsory (8)	75	25

*Table 3: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of attendance and gender, June 2023*

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by fee status 2022-23 (1764) <sup>1</sup>		
UK	EU	International
34.13	2.15	63.72

Table 4: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by fee status, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance & fee status 2022-23 (1764)			
Mode of Attendance and numbers	Fee Status		
	Home	EU	International
Full Time (1628)	29.42	2.27	68.30
Part Time (111)	95.50	0.90	3.60
Continuing Professional Development (17)	100	-	-
Industry Year Compulsory (8)	-	-	100

Table 5: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of attendance and fee status, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by ethnicity (grouped) 2022-23 (1764)				
January	February	March	July	September
25.34	0.96	3.23	0.51	69.95

Table 6: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by programme start date, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by programme start date & fee status 2022-23 (1764)			
Programme Start Date and numbers	Fee Status		
	Home	EU	International
January (447)	0.87	0.45	98.65
February (17)	100	-	-
March (57)	100	-	-
July (9)	55.56	-	44.44

<sup>1</sup> For the 2022-23 and 2023-24, EU students undertaking a course at Royal Holloway received an EU Fee Reduction Scholarship which is 'equivalent to 30% of the difference between the UK (Home) and International fee' for a course. EU students starting in January 2024 will also receive this scholarship. From the 2024-25 academic year, EU students will pay the same fee as international students. For further information see: <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/fees-and-funding/postgraduate/tuition-fees/>

September (1234)	42.06	2.92	55.02
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Table 7: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by programme start date and fee status, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance & programme start date 2022-23 (1764)					
Mode of Attendance and numbers	Programme Start Date				
	Jan.	Feb.	March	July	Sept
Full Time (1628)	27.40	1.04	3.50	0.55	67.50
Part Time (111)	-	-	-	-	100
Continuing Professional Development (17)	-	-	-	-	100
Industry Year Compulsory (8)	12.50	-	-	-	87.50

Table 8: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of attendance and programme start date, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by ethnicity (grouped) 2022-23 (1764)					
Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unknown	White
62.24	7.65	2.21	1.76	1.02	25.11

Table 9: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by ethnicity (grouped), June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance & programme start date 2022-23 (1764)						
Mode of Attendance and numbers	Ethnicity (Grouped)					
	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Unknown	White
Full Time (1628)	66.15	7.55	1.97	1.72	0.92	21.68
Part Time (111)	10.81	0.90	6.31	2.70	1.80	69.37
Continuing Professional Development (17)	23.53	-	-	-	-	76.47
Industry Year Compulsory (8)	62.50	25	-	-	12.50	-

Table 10: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of study and ethnicity (grouped), June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by age bands 2022-23 (1764)							
19 years	20 years	21-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60 +
0.06	1.53	50	27.89	14.57	4.19	1.42	0.34

Table 11: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by age bands, June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by mode of attendance and age bands 2022-23 (1764)								
Mode of Attendance and numbers	Age bands							
	19	20	21-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Full Time (1628)	0.06	1.23	52.40	27.95	13.88	2.95	10.44	0.06
Part Time (111)	-	-	24.32	27.92	20.72	16.21	7.21	3.60
Continuing Professional Development (17)	-	-	-	5.88	41.18	47.06	-	5.88
Industry Year Compulsory (8)	-	-	25	62.50	12.50	-	-	-

Table 12: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by mode of study and age bands June 2023

Overall % of RHUL PGT students by department (1764)			
Business and Management	32.82	History	2.61
Classics	0.28	Information Security	8.62
Computer Science	6.23	Law	2.21
Drama, Theatre and Dance	0.51	Mathematics <sup>2</sup>	-
Earth Sciences	0.74	Media Arts	2.72
Economics	1.30	Music	1.19
Electronic Engineering	12.76	Physics <sup>3</sup>	-
English	3.74	PIR	2.38
Geography	1.70	Psychology	12.59
Health Studies	1.93	Social Work <sup>4</sup>	5.50

Table 13: Overall per cent of Royal Holloway PGT students by department, June 2023

The tables reveal most students undertaking a postgraduate taught degree at Royal Holloway for the 2022-23 academic year were full-time students who began their studies in September. Within this group there was a higher proportion of international students in comparison to Home and EU students by nearly 40 percentage points, just over half of postgraduate taught students were between the ages of 21-24 and there was a larger percentage of Asian students in comparison to the other grouped ethnicities. Some of these figures like age and ethnicity are representative of the entire cohort for the year as well. Overall, the Business and Management department had the highest intake of students during the Policy Inquiry, with Psychology and Electronic Engineering having the second highest intake of students.

While these were the highest proportions of students, the tables also show the postgraduate taught student population at Royal Holloway, and across the sector in general, is extremely diverse and made up of students from many different nationalities, age groups and modes of study. Our project was created with the aim to look at both the traditional trajectory of the degree while simultaneously examining the intersection of postgraduate taught study with other underrepresented communities like international, commuter, mature and part-time students. We were keen to learn the similarities and differences between these various experiences from our engagement with students. Section C of this report will examine the nuances of this community and the degree in greater detail from the data gathered during our project.

<sup>2</sup> There is no postgraduate taught degree within the Department of Mathematics.

<sup>3</sup> The University has a Physics MSc in Research and no postgraduate taught degree.

<sup>4</sup> For our own surveys we did not include Social Work as an option for department because students undertaking a course in Social Work are members of the Law and Criminology department. Three students were additionally classified as Visiting students but have not been included in the table as their department is unclear.

### A3. The Project

Background research into the postgraduate taught student experience has been ongoing since we began our work on postgraduate research students in 2019, however, in the summer months before the 2022-23 academic year the Students' Union undertook further research to ensure we had the most updated information about trends and key issues going on in the sector for postgraduate taught students. The Students' Union collated this information and published a Briefing Document on our website in a blog post in November 2022 when we launched our first online survey for the project. The Briefing Document discussed our preliminary research into postgraduate taught study, explained the degree, the rise in the number of students undertaking postgraduate taught courses at UK Higher Education Institutes and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the postgraduate taught community. We briefly discussed Royal Holloway's previous participation in the Postgraduate Taught Student Experience (PTES) survey, and how the results highlighted there were recurring issues which were negatively impacting Royal Holloway postgraduate taught students that needed to be addressed like a lack of available funding, the high cost of the degree, a desire for more agency during study, poor mental health and students' desire for improved employment opportunities and professional development during their degree.

Most postgraduate taught courses last one year for full-time students and begin in September, and our plan had always been to track the postgraduate taught student lifecycle in a single academic year through online surveys in Term One, Term Three and in the summer months while students worked on their dissertation or major project. Survey questions were designed to ask about different elements of the course at that period and included some recurring questions about their experience to track student satisfaction and agreement in certain areas throughout the academic year. We additionally ran an in-person focus group during Term Two because we wanted to gain more in-depth qualitative data, and to find out if there were any issues that they wanted us to explore in more detail or had yet to address in our later surveys. As a result of these various forms of engagement, the Students' Union managed to engage with postgraduate taught students each term during the 2022-23 academic year, including the write-up period in the summer. These regular check-ins gave us the opportunity to witness the various highs and lows of the degree as the academic year progressed and students transitioned from induction to teaching in the classroom, assessment and, finally, the way it all came together for the final project. None of our previous Policy Inquiries have kept in touch with a group of students this regularly before, and we believe it gave us invaluable insight into the postgraduate taught student experience at Royal Holloway. The next section of this report will explain in more detail the ways we engaged with students through online surveys and our in-person focus group.

## Section B: Methodology

### B1. Overview

This section will discuss the project plan for our Policy Inquiry in more detail and includes the demographic information we gathered from all three surveys and our in-person focus group. Our communications with postgraduate taught students during this project was mainly done through our website and our Instagram account, which included blog posts about the project, links to the survey and infographics for the results. We additionally sent targeted emails to current postgraduate students while the surveys were live which informed them about the purpose of the Policy Inquiry, the survey and any cash prizes still available. We also asked the administrative staff at each of the Schools to circulate the surveys to their postgraduate taught students to boost engagement. A full list of each survey questionnaire and a detailed breakdown of response numbers and cash prizes can be found in a link at the end of the document in Appendix A.

### B2. Term One Survey

Like our previous Policy Inquiries and other long-term research projects, our largest platform for engagement was through online surveys. Our first survey opened on 11 November 2022 and closed on 18 November, and it asked students about their experiences with Term One like inductions, their degree expectations, course organisation, contact with University staff and, finally, the ways they would like to engage with the Students' Union. The survey had a total of 130 valid responses, including two January starters, which was just under 10 per cent of the postgraduate taught student population at Royal Holloway for that term before the arrival of the January cohort.<sup>5</sup>

The tables in this section outline the demographic data we received from respondents' answers during our online and in-person engagement. Some tables in this document have less respondents, and this is a consequence of students not completing the survey, they had chosen to skip the question if allowed, or it was the result of a logic skip. We have labelled all tables in this report with the number of respondents for each question for further clarification on numbers. Tables in this section of the report we have include all potential answers to the demographic question, however, in Section C we removed cells from tables, like departments and ethnicities, which had no responses to streamline discussion of the data.

% of respondents by nationality (130 responses)		
Home	EU	International
31.54	4.62	63.85

Table 14: Overall per cent of respondents by nationality, Term One survey

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<sup>5</sup> The January responses will be discussed later in the paper with the January 2023 induction experience.

% of respondents by residence type (130 responses)		
A University Hall	A private house in Egham / Englefield Green	Other (please specify)
27.69	32.31	40

Table 15: Overall per cent of respondents of respondents by residence type, Term One survey

% of respondents (130 responses)			
Nationality	Types of Residence		
	Halls	Private House in Egham/Englefield Green	Other
Home	12.20	19.51	68.29
EU	50	33.33	16.67
International	33.73	38.55	27.71

Table 16: Overall per cent of respondents' residence status by nationality, Term One survey

% of respondents by age (130 responses)					
24 and under	25-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Prefer not to say
52.31	23.08	16.92	5.38	1.54	0.77

Table 17: Overall per cent of respondents by age, Term One survey

% of survey respondents by ethnicity (130 responses)			
White	37.69	Asian or Asian British	6.92
White and Black Caribbean	-	Caribbean	-
White and Black African	-	African	2.72
White and Asian	0.77	Black or Black British	3.08
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	1.54	Arabic	0.77
Chinese	6.15	Middle Eastern	-
Bangladeshi	0.77	Northern Africa	0.77
Pakistani	2.31	Other	3.08
Indian	33.85	Prefer not to say	0.77

Table 18: Overall per cent of respondents of ethnicity, Term One survey

<b>% of survey respondents by department (130 responses)</b>			
Business and Management	21.54	History	10
Classics	0.77	Information Security	11.54
Computer Science	7.69	Law	3.85
Drama, Theatre and Dance	-	Mathematics	-
Earth Sciences	1.54	Media Arts	2.30
Economics	3.85	Music	3.85
Electronic Engineering	1.54	Physics <sup>6</sup>	1.54
English	4.61	PIR	3.85
Geography	2.30	Psychology	13.85
Health Studies	5.38		

Table 19: Overall per cent of respondents of department by nationality, Term One survey

<b>% of respondents by mode of attendance (129 responses)</b>	
<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
91.47	8.53

Table 20: Overall per cent of respondents by mode of attendance, Term One survey

<b>Is your PGT course a one-year degree or two or more years? Respondents answered as if they were studying full-time.</b>	
<b>% of respondents (129 responses)</b>	
<b>One</b>	<b>Two or more</b>
82.95	17.05

Table 21: Per cent of full-time respondents' length of degree, Term One survey

<sup>6</sup> The two students who answered they were in the Physics Department were undertaking a Master's by Research and, while this project focuses on the taught experience, MScR students have been included in the count for the first survey because many of the questions about the Term One experience and induction would apply to them. Moreover, they are also another marginalised group within the postgraduate experience at Royal Holloway as they sit in between postgraduate taught students and postgraduate research students. We had no students from this department in the other surveys.

Full-time students' year of study	
% of respondents (117 responses)	
One	Two
96.58	3.42

Table 22: Per cent of full-time respondents' year of study, Term One survey

Part-time students' year of study		
Overall % of respondents (11 responses)		
One	Two	Three or more
27.27	63.64	9.09

Table 23: Per cent of part-time respondents' year of study, Term One survey

Mode of study	% of respondents by age (129 responses)					Prefer not to say
	24 and under	25-29	30-39	40-49	50 +	
Full-time	57.63	22.88	16.10	3.39	-	-
Part-time	-	27.27	18.18	27.27	18.18	9.10

Table 24: Per cent of respondents' mode of study by age, Term One survey

Mode of study	% of respondents by nationality (129 responses)		
	Home	EU	International
Full-time	26.27	5.08	68.65
Part-time	90.91	-	9.10

Table 25: Per cent of respondents' mode of study by nationality, Term One survey

Degree start date		
% of respondents (129 responses)		
September 2022	September 2021	September 2019
91.47	6.98	1.55

Table 26: Per cent of respondents by start date, Term One survey

### B3. Term Two In-Person Focus Group

The Students' Union ran an in-person focus group in Tommy's Lounge in the main Students' Union building during Term Two on 7 March 2023, and five students attended. We provided the students with hot drinks and snacks, and the focus group ran for an hour and a half. Even though the Students' Union had a record of names for the focus

group from the initial signup, all students remained anonymous during the event and no names were recorded. Focus group participants provided us with information like their department, study status, start date and nationality to identify any trends, but participants were assured that no identifying information would be traced back to them in the final report. Attendees were instead assigned numbers to help keep track of comments about their different experiences. The focus group was run by the Research and Insight Coordinator who works within the Student Voice Team, and they were supported by their Student Research Assistant. The table below presents the demographic information for the students who attended the Term Two focus group.

Number	Nationality	Study status	Start Date	Department
Student 1	Home	Full-time	Sept 2022	English
Student 2	Home	Full-time	Sept 2022	Classics
Student 3	International	Full-time	Sept 2022	Business & Management
Student 4	International	Full-time	Jan 2023	Business & Management
Student 5	International	Full-time	Sept 2022	Business & Management

*Table 27: Demographic information for Term Two focus group participants*

There was a set list of questions drafted for the focus group, and these can be read in full in Appendix A at the end of this document. We additionally showed the attendees the lowest scoring questions from the Term One survey and asked students if any of these scores resonated with their own experience at Royal Holloway. This table has also been included in the appendix. Finally, we asked the attendees if they felt there was anything specific that we should ask the postgraduate taught community about in our next survey in Term Three. Participants suggested we should ask about the UCU strikes, students' experiences accessing the University's professional services and whether they had to work during the degree due to financial struggles and a lack of maintenance support for this community of students. All these suggestions were included in the questionnaire.

#### **B4. Term Three Survey**

Questions for the second survey were finalised after the focus group, and the survey build was more complicated than the previous one as participants were from both the September and January cohorts, of which the latter had only experienced one term of teaching while the rest of the University was about to start their third term of study. January starters were consequently given a logic skip at the start of the survey which included many questions from the first survey around induction, engagement with their personal tutors and course organisation. We also repeated a handful questions from the Term One survey for all participants to track student satisfaction in certain areas of their postgraduate taught experience like teaching, marking and feedback, whether they feel like they are part of an academic community and, finally, their overall satisfaction of the course.

This survey opened on 27 April 2023 and closed on 9 May. There were 86 valid respondents from the September group and 14 from the January group. Both cohorts

had respondents who started before the 2022-23 academic year and were studying either part-time or doing a full-time course which lasts for more than one year. We asked students whether they participated in the first survey we ran in Term One, and 43.02 per cent of September respondents answered they had. The tables below present the demographic information taken from the survey for both September and January starters.

Cohort and number of respondents	% respondents by nationality (100 responses)		
	Home	EU	International
September (86)	44.19	4.65	51.16
January (14)	-	7.14	92.86

Table 28: Overall per cent of respondents by nationality, Term Three survey

% of September respondents by ethnicity (86 responses)			
White	46.51	Asian or Asian British	-
White and Black Caribbean	-	Caribbean	-
White and Black African	-	African	2.33
White and Asian	-	Black or Black British	1.16
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	2.33	Arabic	-
Chinese	4.65	Middle Eastern	1.16
Bangladeshi	2.33	Northern Africa	1.16
Pakistani	3.49	Other	3.49
Indian	30.23	Prefer not to say	1.16

Table 29: Overall per cent of September respondents by ethnicity, Term Three survey

<b>% of January respondents by ethnicity (14 responses)</b>			
White	7.14	Asian or Asian British	7.14
White and Black Caribbean	-	Caribbean	-
White and Black African	-	African	-
White and Asian	7.14	Black or Black British	-
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	-	Arabic	-
Chinese	-	Middle Eastern	7.14
Bangladeshi	-	Northern Africa	-
Pakistani	-	Other	-
Indian	71.43	Prefer not to say	-

*Table 30: Overall per cent of January respondents by ethnicity, Term Three survey*

<b>% of September respondents by department (86 responses)</b>			
Business and Management	16.28	History	11.63
Classics	1.16	Information Security	13.95
Computer Sciences	8.14	Law	3.49
Drama, Theatre and Dance	-	Mathematics	-
Earth Sciences	2.33	Media Arts	3.49
Economics	3.49	Music	2.33
Electronic Engineering	1.16	Physics	-
English	5.81	PIR	1.16
Geography	4.65	Psychology	15.12
Health Studies	5.81		

*Table 31: Overall per cent of September respondents by ethnicity, Term Three survey*

<b>% of January respondents by department (14 responses)</b>			
Business and Management	42.86	History	-
Classics	-	Information Security	14.28
Computer Science	-	Law	-
Drama, Theatre and Dance	-	Mathematics	-
Earth Sciences	-	Media Arts	-
Economics	-	Music	-
Electronic Engineering	42.86	Physics	-
English	-	PIR	-
Geography	-	Psychology	-
Health Studies	-		

Table 32: Overall per cent of January respondents by ethnicity, Term Three survey

<b>Cohort and number of respondents</b>	<b>% of respondents by mode of attendance (100 responses)</b>	
	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
September (86)	89.53	10.47
January (14)	100	-

Table 33: Per cent of overall respondents by mode of attendance, Term Three survey

<b>Is your PGT course a one-year degree or two or more years? Respondents answered as if they were studying full-time.</b>		
<b>Cohort and number of respondents</b>	<b>% of respondents (100 responses)</b>	
	<b>One</b>	<b>Two or more</b>
September (86)	84.88	15.12
January (14)	85.71	14.29

Table 34: Per cent of full-time respondents' length of degree, Term Three survey

Full-time students' year of study		
Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents (91 responses)	
	One	Two
September (77)	84.42	15.58
January (14)	100	-

Table 35: Per cent of full-time respondents' year of study, Term Three survey

September students' part-time year of study		
% of respondents (9 responses)		
One	Two	Three or more
22.22	66.67	11.11

Table 36: Per cent of September part-time respondents' year of study, Term Three survey

Mode of study	% of September respondents by nationality (86 responses)		
	Home	EU	International
Full-time	37.66	5.19	57.14
Part-time	100	-	-

Table 37: Per cent of September respondents' mode of study by nationality, Term Three survey

Degree start date			
% of September respondents (86 responses)			
September 2022	September 2021	September 2020	September 2019
84.88	12.79	1.16	1.16

Table 38: Per cent of September respondents by start date, Term Three survey

Degree start date	
% of January respondents ( responses)	
January 2023	January 2022
85.71	14.29

Table 39: Per cent of January respondents by start date, Term Three survey

## B5. Summer Survey

The final postgraduate taught student survey opened on 12 July 2023 and closed on 31 July. In total we had 84 valid respondents from the September group and 15 from the January cohort who were submitting their dissertation at the end of the summer. This brought our total engagement for the project to a maximum of 336 students in person and online over the course of a single academic year.<sup>7</sup>

While the previous surveys asked about an array of experiences during the degree, the last survey looked more specifically at students' experiences with the dissertation or major project which takes place during the summer months following the end of teaching and exams in Term Three. Even though January 2023 students had only two terms of study at this point, some students were in the process of writing their dissertation depending on which model they were undertaking. We repeated a question from the first survey about students' reasons for undertaking a degree and whether their experience matched their expectations. The one question we asked in all three surveys was about students' overall satisfaction with the course. The tables below present the demographic information taken from the survey for both September and January starters.

Cohort and number of respondents	% respondents by nationality (99 responses)		
	Home	EU	International
September (84)	48.81	5.95	45.24
January (15)	-	-	100

*Table 40: Overall per cent of respondents by nationality, summer survey*

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<sup>7</sup> This includes the two January respondents who participated in the Term One survey.

<b>% of September respondents by ethnicity (84 responses)</b>			
White	50	Asian or Asian British	4.76
White and Black Caribbean	-	Caribbean	-
White and Black African	-	African	2.38
White and Asian	1.19	Black or Black British	2.38
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	2.38	Arabic	-
Chinese	1.19	Middle Eastern	-
Bangladeshi	-	Northern Africa	1.19
Pakistani	5.95	Other	3.57
Indian	22.62	Prefer not to say	2.38

*Table 41: Overall per cent of September respondents by ethnicity, summer survey*

<b>% of January respondents by ethnicity (15 responses)</b>			
White	-	Asian or Asian British	13.33
White and Black Caribbean	-	Caribbean	-
White and Black African	-	African	-
White and Asian	-	Black or Black British	-
Any other Mixed or Multiple background	-	Arabic	-
Chinese	-	Middle Eastern	-
Bangladeshi	-	Northern Africa	-
Pakistani	-	Other	-
Indian	80	Prefer not to say	6.67

*Table 42: Overall per cent of January respondents by ethnicity, summer survey*

<b>% of September respondents by department (84 responses)</b>			
Business and Management	17.86	History	8.33
Classics	1.19	Information Security	7.14
Computer Sciences	3.57	Law	4.76
Drama, Theatre and Dance	2.38	Mathematics	-
Earth Sciences	2.38	Media Arts	4.76
Economics	4.76	Music	3.57
Electronic Engineering	3.57	Physics	-
English	8.33	PIR	4.76
Geography	4.76	Psychology	11.90
Health Studies	5.95		

*Table 43: Overall per cent of September respondents by department, summer survey*

<b>% of January respondents by department (15 responses)</b>			
Business and Management	40	History	-
Classics	-	Information Security	20
Computer Sciences	6.67	Law	-
Drama, Theatre and Dance	-	Mathematics	-
Earth Sciences	-	Media Arts	-
Economics	-	Music	-
Electronic Engineering	33.33	Physics	-
English	-	PIR	-
Geography	-	Psychology	-
Health Studies	-		

*Table 44: Overall per cent of January respondents by department, summer survey*

Is your PGT course a one-year degree or two or more years? Respondents answered as if they were studying full-time.		
Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents (99 responses)	
	One	Two or more
September (84)	89.29	10.71
January (15)	73.33	26.67

Table 45: Per cent of full-time respondents' length of degree, summer survey

Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents by mode of attendance (99 responses)	
	Full-time	Part-time
September (84)	91.67	8.33
January (15)	100	-

Table 46: Per cent of overall respondents by mode of attendance, summer survey

Full-time students' year of study		
Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents (92 responses)	
	One	Two
September (77)	93.51	6.49
January (15)	80	20

Table 47: Per cent of full-time respondents' year of study, summer survey

September students' part-time year of study		
% of respondents (7 responses)		
One	Two	Three or more
28.57	71.43	-

Table 48: Per cent of September part-time respondents' year of study, summer survey

Mode of study	% of September respondents by nationality (86 responses)		
	Home	EU	International
Full-time	37.66	5.19	57.14
Part-time	100	-	-

Table 49: Per cent of September respondents' mode of study by nationality, summer survey

Degree start date	
% of September respondents (86 responses)	
September 2022	September 2021
89.29	10.71

Table 50: Per cent of September respondents by start date, summer survey

Degree start date	
% of January respondents (15 responses)	
January 2023	January 2022
73.33	26.67

Table 51: Per cent of January respondents by start date, summer survey

## B5. Sharing Data and Composing Recommendations

During this Policy Inquiry the Students' Union changed the way we share data with students. Previous student feedback highlighted our Student Voice and Student Insight Reports can sometimes be dense and challenging to read. Research accountability has taken priority over the last two academic years, and our first venture with sharing survey data in shorter blog posts and with visual infographics began with the Term One survey results, which we shared on our social media accounts and in a blog post on our website in February 2023 before our Term Two focus group. For readability we rounded the figures in all our infographics to their approximate percentage, however, the tables in this report share the more exact figures in line with our previous publications. During the focus group we asked students about their opinion of the infographics, and we received extremely positive feedback. They really appreciated being kept updated on the results because it made the data more accessible. We have shared all subsequent research work with students as infographics on our website and social media accounts before publishing our final reports. A copy of the shared infographics for all three of our postgraduate taught student surveys can be found in Appendix B at the end of this document. We are additionally publishing a short, three-page summary of this report to create a more accessible student-friendly document which summarises the findings from this project. This summary can be found on the Students' Union website.

The process of identifying solutions and composing recommendations for the University and the Students' Union began upon completion of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the final survey during the summer months. Policy Inquiries were created

with the aim to involve students in the deliberation process, and we shared the list of potential recommendations with Royal Holloway students in targeted emails to postgraduate taught students from both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 cohorts in October 2023 alongside the final infographic for the summer survey results. We asked students to email the Student Voice team or comment on the blog post with any concerns or suggestions to improve these recommendations before we published the final report. We received no student comments about these recommendations, and the list that was shared in October is the same as the recommendations included at the end of this document. Following publication of the recommendations, the Students' Union was approached by Wonkhe, a higher education news platform, to discuss the results from our three surveys in a little more detail. The blog, 'It is time for real and positive change in the PGT student experience', was published on the Wonkhe website on 26 October 2023.

## Section C: Findings

### C1. Overview

The subsequent sections of this report will discuss the following topics in further detail: degree expectations and inductions, teaching, course structure and organisation, assessment, careers and employability, the postgraduate taught community, and what role the Students' Union should play in the postgraduate taught experience at Royal Holloway.

### C2. Degree Expectations vs. Experience at Royal Holloway

Many postgraduate taught students begin studying their degree immediately after completing their undergraduate course. 50 per cent of the postgraduate taught student population at Royal Holloway during the 2022-23 academic year were categorised in the 21-24 age band by the University's Data Management team and it can be assumed that many of these students decided to follow this route and continue studying. There are, however, still a large proportion of students at the University who have returned to undertake the degree after taking a break from studying, as a requirement for their job, for entry into a specific career or even for pleasure to explore new interests following retirement. Some of these mature students take a break in their career and study full-time, but there are also postgraduate taught students who study part-time due to work and caring responsibilities.

The Students' Union wanted to know why current students decided to undertake a postgraduate taught degree. We asked this question in our Term One survey in November 2022 and again in our summer survey in July 2023. Understanding students' motivations for further study is incredibly useful because students might have certain expectations about the degree based on this decision, for example, students studying to improve their career prospects might desire more practical components, professional skills development or a strong employability emphasis within the course and University professional services. Students considering a postgraduate research degree might anticipate the course content and workload to be more difficult than the undergraduate degree so they are better prepared for the next step in their education. The table below reveals September participants' responses to this question in our Term One survey.

Why have you decided to undertake a PGT degree? (Please select all that apply)	
Reason	Overall % of respondents (122 responses)
To progress in my current career path	54.92
To further my education post undergraduate study (completed elsewhere)	49.18
For personal interest	31.15
As a requirement to enter a profession	28.69
To change my current career	20.49
To further my education post undergraduate study (completed at Royal Holloway)	14.75
To meet the requirements of my current job	5.74
Other (please specify)	1.64

*Table 52: Reasons postgraduate taught students undertook the degree, Term One survey*

September students who answered in the 'Other category' listed that they wanted 'to change my future career path' and that they saw the degree as a way 'to work in the UK/EU'. Student responses in our summer survey were a bit more evenly spread out, although 'to progress in my current career path' remained the top reason students decided to undertake a postgraduate taught degree. This highlights there is a strong consensus the degree is considered a means to better employment opportunities. The table below presents September and January respondents' answers to this question in the summer survey.

In Term One we asked students why they decided to undertake a PGT degree. We would like to repeat that question here. (Please select all answers that apply).		
Reason	Sept % of respondents	Jan % of respondents
To progress in my current career path.	48	41.67
To further my education post undergraduate study (completed elsewhere).	37.33	41.67
For personal interest.	37.33	25
To further my education post undergraduate study (completed at Royal Holloway).	25.33	-
As a requirement to enter a profession.	21.33	-
To change my current career.	18.67	33.33
Other	9.33	-
To meet the requirements of my current job.	4	-

*Table 53: Reasons postgraduate taught students undertook the degree, summer survey*

Students who selected 'Other' listed a variety of reasons like a complete career change from one profession to another, not ready to leave study, Royal Holloway's degree options were 'the best fit', the degree would 'strengthen their CV', previous experience with undergraduate study here and, finally, the degree would give them an 'advantage' when submitting applications for postgraduate research study.

In our Term One survey we asked an additional question about students' reasons for postgraduate taught study, and why they specifically chose to come to Royal Holloway. Students from both the September 2022 cohort or earlier September starters provided a free-text response to the question, and used the space to discuss multiple reasons which influenced their decision to study at Royal Holloway. The table below presents recurring themes mentioned in the student comments.

Why did you decide to study at Royal Holloway?	
Reason	% of comments (122 responses)
Reputation and ranking	47.54
Course content / structure	45.08
Convenient location	16.39
Beautiful campus	13.11
Did undergraduate at RHUL	10.66
Teaching staff	9.02
Affordability / Availability of scholarship	6.56
Study culture and environment	6.56
To advance careers and skills	3.28

Table 54: Reasons postgraduate taught students decided to study at Royal Holloway, Term One survey

47.54 per cent of the comments discussed the ways the University's good reputation and ranking were the reason why they chose to undertake their postgraduate taught degree at Royal Holloway. Departments which received a specific mention in the comments were Information Security, Psychology and History. Below is a selection of student comments that discuss the University's reputation from September respondents during the Term One survey.

*I particularly chose Royal Holloway, because, firstly, it's one of the most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, and secondly, the course structure is well curated, it contains the modules that I am particularly interested in.*

*It has one of the best psychology departments in the UK.*

*Because of the curricula and reputation.*

45.08 of the comments mentioned the course content and structure of the degree at Royal Holloway played a role in their decision. Some respondents stated certain courses suited their interests, while others highlighted that Royal Holloway was the only institution which offered the course they wanted to study. In terms of structure, some respondents stated they liked the alternative study options offered at Royal Holloway like a final creative project instead of a more traditional thesis. Other positives included block mode study and the option to attend classes in both the Egham and London campuses.

*Out of all UK universities Royal Holloway has the most well-established program that I needed.*

*Royal Holloway offered the best set of modules that was most suitable for me, an MSc in Clinical psychology comes with mostly research, whilst Royal Holloway instead offered a mix of research and practical knowledge.*

*Royal Holloway is the only university having a dedicated information security department and I wanted to acquire greater knowledge of information security. The education quality here is second to none. That is why I decided to study at the Royal Holloway.*

16.39 per cent of respondents highlighted the University's location was an important factor. Some students stated that they liked that the Egham Campus was situated outside London but still had good transport links to town. There were other students who mentioned they chose to study at Royal Holloway because they wanted to attend the London Campus in Bloomsbury. There were also a handful of responses which highlighted the campus location was close to where they lived.

*Its ranking was good and its known as a university encouraging research. Its proximity to London didn't preclude us from having good career opportunities after the course.*

*The modules are all interesting and I wanted to be in central London, so the LGS campus was a perfect location.*

13.11 per cent of respondents admitted the Egham Campus and its historic architecture influenced their decision to study at Royal Holloway.

*Good reputation and beautiful campus.*

*The content of the course module matched my interests and what I wanted from the course. Other reasons being the campus and the lively communities in the university.*

*The Information security course is renowned and highly rated. I also wanted to study in a campus based Uni.*

10.66 per cent of respondents admitted they did their undergraduate study at Royal Holloway. The familiarity of the department, teaching staff and alumni discount were all listed as contributing factors. A handful of students additionally mentioned their undergraduate experience was negatively impacted by the pandemic and continuing their study at Royal Holloway allowed them the opportunity to reclaim some of that lost experience.

*I really enjoyed my undergraduate experience here and was familiar with the music department and how good it is.*

*I enjoyed my undergraduate course, and took advantage of the alumni discount.*

*I studied for my undergraduate degree at Royal Holloway and really enjoyed my studies here as my course conveyors are passionate about the same period of literature as I am. Further, with the pandemic, I wanted another year at RHUL that allowed me to experience it fully.*

9.02 per cent of respondents mentioned the teaching staff in their department were one of the reasons they applied at Royal Holloway.

*I was looking for a programme that focuses on innovative digital transformation trends particularly in marketing. I searched on Google and LinkedIn. I came across the lecturers of the programme. They were quite inspirational professionals in the digital marketing. Therefore, I decided to study at Royal Holloway on MSc Digital Marketing.*

*I was attracted to the Public History department, Professor Amy Tooth Murphy's specialty in queer histories, the opportunity to do a creative project rather than a thesis, and proximity to London.*

*New lecturers, teaching styles, musical influences, new musicians etc for networking.*

6.56 per cent of respondents mentioned the affordability and scholarship opportunities played a role in their decision. Some students mentioned the course fees were more affordable at Royal Holloway compared to other universities. The alumni discount was also mentioned multiple times, and some respondents stated they had received other Royal Holloway and external scholarships to help pay their tuition fees.

*It was one of the options for my scholarship.*

*Suited my academic and financial needs. Receiving a scholarship from RHUL made studying accessible.*

*Alumni discount, scholarship, ease of not having to move, loved my undergraduate studies here, two jobs.*

6.56 per cent of respondents mentioned the study culture at the University was important to them.

*The quality of education and good environment.*

*The content of the course module matched my interests and what I wanted from the course. Other reasons being the campus and the lively communities in the university.*

*Due to better study environment and one of the oldest university. Also, good ranking among others.*

Only 3.28 per cent of respondents mentioned they felt the University would improve their careers and professional skills development. This is interesting because nearly half of survey respondents in both the Term One and the summer survey answered they wanted 'to progress in my current career path' as one of the reasons they undertook a postgraduate taught degree, but only a handful of students mentioned this as a reason they chose to study at Royal Holloway.

*Take advantage of the opportunity to do an independent piece of research under the guidance of a mentor, and to assess whether I'm suitable to pursue a career in security research.*

*I decided to study in Royal Holloway because of the various course options they offered, the beautiful campus of the University, and to strengthen my career foundation.*

*MSc Information Security from Royal Holloway University of London in the UK as the degree duration is 1 year and affordable to International Students. It is one of the UK's leading research-intensive universities. The degree is globally accepted and is widely acknowledged as a top UK department, with rankings reflecting teaching and research excellence and providing various job opportunities.*

Learning about students' reasons for study and choosing Royal Holloway helped us gain insight into some of the drivers of the degree for this community. But did their experience of study match their expectations? We could only really find out in the summer months while students were completing their dissertation or major project and were able to look back at the entire arc of their degree at Royal Holloway. We asked students in July how much they agreed with the following statement: 'The course has met the expectations I had at the start of my study'.<sup>8</sup> We received a total of 87 responses from both September and January starters from the 2022-23 cohort with a handful of pre-2022 students. The tables below present the results for this question, and we have separated January and September answers due to their different course structures and experiences.<sup>9</sup>

How much do you agree with the following statement?: 'The course has met the expectations I had at the start of my study.'					
Cohort and respondent numbers	% of survey respondents (87 responses)				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
September (75)	24	42.67	14.67	12	6.66
January (12)	25	41.67	-	33.33	-

*Table 55: Experience vs. Expectation of study, summer survey*

The table reveals that both cohorts had around 66 per cent agreement to an extent with this statement. From the September response group, 52.38 per cent of full-time students agreed to an extent in comparison to 75 per cent of part-time students. In relation to fee status, 56 per cent of Home students agreed to an extent in comparison to 60 per cent of EU students and 50 per cent of international students. The January group were all full-time international students.

<sup>8</sup> We used a logic skip to exclude students who had yet to begin work on their dissertation or major project from answering this question

<sup>9</sup> Students with a September start date traditionally follow a course structure composed of two terms of teaching, a term or period of assessment and finally a term or period for completing the dissertation or major project in the summer with a submission date at some time in August or September 2023. January starters were broken up into two separate models for the very first time in 2023. Model One followed the same structure as September students in terms of teaching, assessment and set period for the dissertation or major project with a submission date in early December. The Model Two January group had a very different structure composed of one term of teaching, a term or period of assessment, a term or period of the dissertation with a submission date in September, and a second term of teaching in October with assessment happening in early December. January degrees only allow students to undertake full-time study, however, some course lengths last two years.

In our Term Two focus group we asked students this same question and three students answered that it had not met their expectations, one student was enjoying the degree, and one student answered it had met 90 per cent of their expectations. Some of the reasons listed by the focus group attendees as to why the degree had not met their expectations were because the course had no real-life experience or practical elements. They additionally felt like the teaching was not the level of difficulty they had expected and, as a course rep, one student maintained this feeling was shared within their department. Another student felt like their third year of undergraduate study was more difficult than the postgraduate taught degree, although they were still enjoying the course content and questioned whether that played a part in their perception of difficulty. Two January starters attended the focus group from each of the separate models. One stated they were extremely unhappy with how condensed the course programme was with a September dissertation date, the online inductions they watched were not very clear and they did not know the dissertation deadline submission was scheduled in September before enrolling onto the course. They were also under the impression their degree ended in September after submitting the dissertation, and because of this they argued it was unfair January students paid the same as September students for a shorter degree. The September dissertation date had negatively impacted their satisfaction with the course overall. Two other students at the focus group confirmed this was a shared feeling for many of the January cohort who had a dissertation deadline in September. This will be discussed later in the report, but this perception of a shorter degree was a result of poor communication about the separate January models' teaching structure, and January starters study for the same length as September starters. The other January starter maintained they expected more from the degree in terms of teaching and subject matter, and it was not the level they expected a postgraduate taught degree should be. As a result, they had 'mixed feelings' of satisfaction.

The student who felt the degree had met their expectations maintained the marking criteria had 'really jumped up a level' in comparison to their undergraduate experience at Royal Holloway. They also stated all their modules had been good. Their biggest complaint about the experience was that financial struggles had added another layer of stress to the degree because of the lack of maintenance loan. Administrative errors with an Intercollegiate degree were also extremely frustrating and negatively impacted their experience of the course.

Many of the student comments in the summer survey mirrored the focus group responses where teaching and the course content were generally praised while other elements of the degree negatively impacted their overall experience. Below is a breakdown of recurring themes which appeared in the student comments about their experience from the September group. There was only one January comment which listed their experience as '10/10'.

Experience Agreement Discussion Themes	
Theme	% of comments (46 responses)
Teaching staff were good	19.57
Course content was good	15.22
UCU strikes impacted experience	15.22
Course not very different from undergrad	13.04
Wanted more contact hours	8.70
Teaching could be improved	8.70
Wanted more practical experience	8.70
Did not enjoy dissertation / final project	4.35
Other	15.22

Table 56: Experience agreement discussion themes, summer survey

Student comments grouped together in the 'Other' category mentioned they felt there was a lack of community in their department, assessments were too easy, they preferred coursework to exams, the course was run poorly, they expected to have a job after completing the course and, finally, they felt January starters made the course oversubscribed. When we asked students later in the survey if they had ever considered leaving or suspending their studies, 24 per cent of September respondents and 8.33 per cent of January respondents answered yes. Four per cent of September students and 25 per cent of January students answered, 'Prefer not to say'. We asked students to explain reasons why they considered leaving, and 16.67 per cent of the student comments who answered yes mentioned it was because the course did not meet their expectations. Below is a selection of student comments from the summer survey which present a selection of arguments as to whether their experience at Royal Holloway met their expectation of the postgraduate taught degree.

*The course has been amazing and fulfilled expectations. The one caveat is that, due to the university management/administrations poor decision making in how they compensate their staff, my work isn't being marked which had really added unnecessary stress and difficulty to the dissertation and final project process.*

*Be it my negligence or the course, when I started I thought I would gain some practical hands on skills as well rather than just learning about the skills which I had already done so in my undergraduate.*

*Before applying for the program I did my research as to what i will get to study in this course and they matched the career i wanted to pursue and the professors have been very helpful with the course making sure everyone learns through the classes and assignments given to us. This degree has taught me a lot and has definitely met the expectations I had in the start.*

*Yes, in terms of content and marking (and essay's that give us those grades) then everything is as I expected. The only disappointment has been the industrial action and me losing classes as a result. Given the fact I only had 4 contact hours a week, which is already very small, I would have liked to have had more from that and it not be ruined with industrial action. –Summer survey*

*Course material did not live up to my expectations.*

*The course was not what it advertised. It is framed as a practical course yet in order to complete any practical directing I received pushback from the department. The systems built are disfunctional [sic] and have left 7/8 of the people in my program very disappointed. Any ambition I had coming into this program has been conditioned out of me, I was told no, more than I was ever encouraged to try new things. It was a waste of the 19,000 GBP I paid.*

The rest of this report will look at various elements of the postgraduate taught experience, and the ways they had a positive or negative impact on students' overall experience of, and satisfaction with, the degree at Royal Holloway during the 2022-23 academic year.

### C3. Inductions, Guidance and Support

At Royal Holloway there are a variety of postgraduate taught courses spread across the different Schools and departments. Some courses last for one year if undertaking full-time study, and two years as a part-time student. Other courses may last two or more years of full-time study which means the degree can stretch anywhere from four to six years for a part-time student. For the 2022-23 academic year, Royal Holloway students who began or continued their studies with a September start were able to move into campus accommodation from 16 September and participate in the University 'Welcome Week' the following Monday. Move-in weekend and Welcome Week both coincided with the Students' Union's own Fresher Festival on the Egham Campus, which offers a large programme of events for all new and returning students. Teaching at Royal Holloway began the following week. January 2023 starters and returning students on a longer January course participated in a Welcome Week from 2 January, and the Students' Union Refreshers occurred the following week on the Egham Campus.

During both Welcome Weeks, postgraduate taught students were able to participate in various induction sessions run by their departments, Schools and the University's professional services like the Wellbeing Department, the library, the Careers Service and CEDAS. We asked September students in our Term One survey and January students in our Term Three survey whether they attended any of these induction sessions, and the tables below presents the results. We have included January responses from the Term One survey in the second table.

Which of these PGT Induction sessions did you attend (Please select all that apply)	
Session	Overall % of September respondents (122 responses)
By my department	67.21
General PGT Induction	41.80
By the library	30.33
By CEDAS	29.51
By International Student Support	18.03
By Careers Service	17.21
None of the above	9.84
Other (please specify)	0.82

Table 57: Postgraduate Taught Induction sessions for September starters, Term One survey

Which of these PGT Induction sessions did you attend (Please select all that apply)	
Session	Overall % of January respondents 14 respondents, Term One and Three surveys)
By International Student Support	35.71
By Careers Service	35.71
By my department	35.71
General PGT Induction	28.57
None of the above	28.57
By the library	21.43
By CEDAS	14.29

Table 58: Postgraduate Taught Induction sessions for January starters, Term One and Three survey

Twelve students from the September group answered they did not attend any induction session and there were a variety of reasons given—conflicting field trips, the cost to commute to campus was too much to justify an extra trip, belief that the sessions were unnecessary and late arrivals to campus due to visa or travel delays. One student stated they were admitted to the course late due to an enrolment error made by the University. No students in either survey mentioned whether recorded induction material was available after the welcome period.

While there were less January respondents in our Term Three survey compared to the September respondents in our Term One survey, the lower attendance rate for induction sessions for the January cohort gave us pause. Did coming in the middle of the academic year have an impact on the communication and provision of induction sessions for new students? 21.42 per cent of January respondents in our Term Three survey answered they did not attend because the University did not inform them about inductions, they had health issues at the time, or they maintained there were no induction talks for students studying in Central London at the London Campus despite one taking place. One January respondent in our Term One survey maintained they did not know about any of the induction events. As a result of these responses, the University, Schools and departments should review the induction process for January starters and whether this group of students are receiving the same level of support and guidance during their induction period as September students.

We asked students about their satisfaction with the support and guidance they received from academic, administrative and professional staff at the start of their first term, and students were given the option to explain their rating in an attached free-text comment box. The tables below present student satisfaction around staff support during this period in September and January for both the Term One and Term Three surveys.

Student satisfaction questions	% of September survey respondents				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the guidance and support provided by the University to help you settle into your course? (117 responses)	30.91	48.48	10.91	8.18	1.82

*Table 59: Satisfaction with support and guidance from University staff during induction, September starters, Term One survey*

Student satisfaction questions	% of January respondents				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the guidance and support provided by the University to help you settle into your course? (12 responses)	41.67	41.67	-	8.33	8.33

*Table 60: Satisfaction with support and guidance from University staff during induction, January starters, Term One and Three surveys*

46 September students and three January starters used the free-text response option to discuss their satisfaction in more detail. Most of the comments revealed that students found the induction sessions and staff support helpful during this period. There were recurring mentions that staff were friendly, the information was clear, and any questions students might have had were answered. This was reiterated in one of the January comments about settling into the course, although that student did not attend any induction event.

*I am very satisfied with the guidance and the support provided due to how welcoming everyone is, from the lecturers to supervisors and even the societies themselves. Everything is just well-done here. –Term One survey*

*Induction provided a complete explanation of course. –Term One survey*

The second most repeated comment was that the administrative aspect around inductions were poor. There were also repeated instances where students mentioned important information like the time and dates of events were not clearly stated or were shared at the last minute, including enrolment information and student status.

*Good amount of inductions/mixers but timetable was only available a week before start of course. –Term One survey*

*While the faculty and student services are very helpful, the admin team isn't. –Term One survey*

*Missed out on important general communication since I was not included in the mailing list. –Term One survey*

*I had to really chase internal services to complete my enrolment. I had to chase the Fees team to explain that my course is funded through the NHS. I had to chase the Course Administrator to get my enrolment details e.g. student number, email address etc. –Term One survey*

*'Administration is never able to answer any questions (e.g. do we have lectures during summer term)'. –Term Three survey*

The last comment above was provided by a January student on the Model Two course track which had split teaching in between the dissertation or final project, and confusion around this course was a major issue for January students on this model. **The lack of communication from the administrative teams about term dates, teaching and examination schedules for the January cohort is particularly concerning and will be discussed in more later in the report.** These recurring comments from both groups suggest that the University, Schools and departments should review the induction process for September and January postgraduate taught students, and ensure the time and date of events are easily accessible and correct on the Royal Holloway main website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App.

There were conflicting opinions from the September group in our Term One survey about the material presented during the induction talks. Some students maintained the information was repetitive from their undergraduate experience at Royal Holloway while other students felt there were assumptions in knowledge they lacked from doing their studies elsewhere. A handful of students highlighted that the inductions were good from a general knowledge perspective about the way the University runs, but they were not targeted towards postgraduate taught students.

*My course and their inductions were great, but I felt that the general ones were aimed at new students to Royal Holloway and was repeating the information I already knew. So perhaps this should be mentioned before induction. –Term One survey*

*Some more help could have been available for students coming from a different undergrad degree. –Term One survey*

*The university has been helpful as we settle in. I think there is an assumption we all know how to use Moodle, submit papers and check essay scores but since I didn't previously attend school here, I didn't know how it worked. It would have been great to get a bit more introduction to the system. –Term One survey*

*We had a detailed induction for our course and from the library. Wish there was something specific for all PGT students from the University in general on how to settle into Uni life in the induction week. –Term One survey*

These issues reveal the University, Schools and departments should review the induction material and processes for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction period. University professional service inductions should consider signposting which sessions are the same as undergraduate ones former Royal Holloway students might have already participated in. Additionally, the University could create a separate induction talk for postgraduate taught students who are new to Royal Holloway. Departments and Schools should ensure information about online resources and digital learning through Moodle is clear for all incoming students.

Finally, as seen from some of the student comment earlier, there is a perceived lack of support during the induction period from postgraduate taught students based at the London Campus. One student in the January group maintained there were no induction sessions, while two September students used the comment section to discuss the ways they feel there is a lack of support for London students in comparison to those based in Egham.

*My course is taught at the London Campus where we would have liked to have the support facilities (e.g. Student Services Center) that are available at the Egham Campus. –Term One survey*

*Felt disconnected from the main campus and didn't receive much help to settle. –Term One survey*

The London Campus does host a Welcome Day for incoming students during the September and January Welcome Week period, and this event includes multiple sessions about University services as well as information about Schools and courses based in London. The survey has shown, however, there is room for improvement for making London students feel more included, and the University, schools, departments and the Students' Union should consider ways to improve engagement with postgraduate taught students who are situated at the London Campus during both induction periods.

Finally, there is one area of the postgraduate student experience we believe needs to be added to the induction schedule for this community—financial advice. In our summer survey we asked students if they had ever considered pausing or leaving their studies and 21.84 per cent of respondents from both the January and September cohorts answered they had while 6.90 per cent answered they would prefer not to say. The January student who considered said it was because the '[c]ourse material did not live up to my expectations'. From the September group, however, 27.78 per cent of the comments mentioned financial issues as one of the main reasons they considered pausing or leaving. 22.22 per cent of comments stated the split between working and studying was too demanding, and students who mentioned this issue were all studying full-time. Below is a selection of responses from our summer survey which present

students' financial struggles while undertaking the degree during the 2022-23 academic year.

*It was largely personal and nothing at all to do with the university itself, the cost of living crisis and higher energy costs led me to need to work far more hours than I intended—nearly 50 a week for months –which put me very far behind my studies.*

*This course is so expensive and the gov support so little that I had to work nearly full time hours to get by, this has impacted my ability to complete my work to the standard I would like to. This has led to negative mental health and so I tried to suspend my course at the end of term two, only to be told I couldn't.*

*As I was commuting to the London campus from Egham, working three jobs and president of a student group, I often had financial struggle and felt overwhelmed at times.*

*It is so expensive, and I am working so much I can't fully 'enjoy' my education.*

For the 2022-23 academic year, the Postgraduate Master's Loan allowed Home students to claim up to £11,836 to cover the cost of their course fees. The amount is not based on the student's or family's income, and if the course lasts for more than one year the loan is divided equally across each year. Any student who has done an integrated master's degree is not eligible to claim this loan again for additional postgraduate taught study.<sup>10</sup> Crucially, this loan does not help cover any additional costs students may incur while studying like living and traveling expenses. For EU and international students, finding the resources to cover the higher course fees can be more precarious because they are not eligible for most UK loans and many students rely on private resources to fund their studies. That lack of financial support offered to postgraduate taught students means that many students need to work part- or full-time to make ends meet. In our Term Three survey we asked students whether they have undertaken paid employment while studying and the number of hours they work. The tables below present the results for September and January respondents. The January respondents were all international students with full-time student status.

<b>While studying have you undertaken paid employment?</b>			
<b>% of respondents</b>			
<b>Cohort and response number</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes, but only during holidays</b>	<b>No</b>
September (79)	59.49	6.33	34.18
January (10)	-	20	80

Table 61: Per cent of respondents undertaking paid employment while studying, Term Three survey

<sup>10</sup> For further information about the Postgraduate Master's Loan see: <https://www.gov.uk/masters-loan>

While studying have you undertaken paid employment?			
Nationality	% of September respondents (79 responses)		
	Yes	Yes, but only during holidays	No
Home	61.76	8.82	29.41
EU	50	25	25
International	58.54	2.44	39.02

Table 62: Per cent of September respondents by nationality undertaking paid employment while studying, Term Three survey

How many hours of paid employment do you undertake on average per week?				
Type of Study (September)	% of September respondents (52 responses)			
	Less than 10 hours	10-20 hours	21-30 hour	More than 30 hours
Full time	26.67	64.44	4.44	4.44
Part time	28.57	-	14.29	57.14

Table 63: Per cent of September respondents by study status and hours worked, Term Three survey

How many hours of paid employment do you undertake on average per week			
% of January respondents (2 responses)			
Less than 10 hours	10-20 hours	21-30 hours	More than 30 hours
-	100	-	-

Table 64: Per cent of January respondents hours worked, Term Three survey

Royal Holloway offers a 15 per cent discount for all alumni, and this is applied automatically to their first year of study, but it cannot be used in conjunction with the University's Principle Master's Scholarship or any Continuing Professional Development courses. The University has a selection of scholarships for Home and international postgraduate taught students which may help with tuition fee reductions, offer cash rewards, research costs, or training opportunities.<sup>11</sup> Most of these, however, are subject- or country-specific and the majority of international students undertaking a postgraduate taught degree will not have additional aid. It is clear many postgraduate taught students are struggling to make ends meet while undertaking a degree due to the rising costs of living.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/studying-here/fees-and-funding/scholarships/> for further information.

Consequently, the University, Schools and departments should consider including an induction talk on Financial Advice for postgraduate taught students during both the September and January induction periods which explains other ways students may be able to access additional support while studying. This induction talk should explain the application process for the University's Study Support Grant and discuss other ways postgraduate taught students can access external funding opportunities through research councils or non-academic grants. Presenting this information and signposting students to alternative means of support at the start of the degree may help students feel better prepared and more empowered to seek help if they're struggling financially later in their studies.

#### C4. Course Organisation and Communication

Throughout the Policy Inquiry there were certain aspects of the student experience we wanted to track to see if there were any major changes in students' experiences while undertaking the degree. Timetable issues as well as course organisation were two of these areas. In our Term One survey, 25.23 per cent of September respondents answered that they had experienced timetable issues with models, coursework deadlines and/or exams. In our Term Three survey this number increased to 26.58 per cent for September respondents while January respondents had 50 per cent of respondents who answered yes.

In the free text responses for our Term One survey the most common issue raised by students were problems with their timetables, and a high-frequency complaint was that there were major delays where class schedules were not available until after term started and teaching had begun. Errors were another common problem, and many students mentioned classes were often held in a different location to what was stated on their timetable. Finally, multiple students mentioned problems with module registration, and this resulted in delayed schedules as well as an inability to sign up for modules they were interested in taking. This was reaffirmed in the survey when we asked students whether they had any difficulties when registering for course modules, and 23.97 per cent of September respondents answered yes in our Term One survey. These mistakes continued to occur throughout the academic year and students raised this problem again in our Term Three survey. Below is a selection of student comments from both surveys which discuss their negative experiences with scheduling and other administrative errors with schedules and registration.

*I did not get a timetable until the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of term. –Term One survey*

*Very poor admin ability for part time students, lots of clarifications and alterations needed every term, it's very frustrating. –Term One survey*

*Some lectures were overlapping. –Term Three survey*

*After I eventually enrolled, which was a problem in itself, it meant that my module sign-up was delayed and I did not have as much time as I wanted to decide on my modules. Many of the modules were taking place at the same time so it made it difficult to choose. –Term One survey*

*I chose this university for 3 specific modules that it offered—two of them have been cancelled since and one was cancelled midway through the year after we were told it would be running. –Term One survey*

*It's very easy to get 'lost in the system' and while errors are always quickly rectified it is a hassle having to bring up the same issues with enrolment again and again. –Term Three survey*

To avoid these issues Schools and departments should review their timetable process and ensure postgraduate taught students receive their schedules in a timely manner before the start of term and that all information is accurate before teaching commences. Even though, 90.99 per cent of respondents answered that they received regular communication from their department about changes in the course or teaching in our Term One survey, there is still a proportion of students who are not receiving this information and it is negatively impacting their student experience at Royal Holloway. Our surveys flagged that many part-time and Continuing Professional Development students feel overlooked by university administrators, especially in terms of getting the correction information around timetabling, registration and changes to the course as seen in the student comments from our Term One and Three surveys below.

*I am a CPD student and study at the same time as being employed full time. Course admin defaults to the majority of the student body (full time) and CPD students struggle to get relevant information and guidance. –Term Three survey*

*Was not explained by staff that CPD students have to reregister every year for a the course. Admin staff seem to have little idea about much at all to be frank and answers tend to be generic and unhelpful until you hit a management level. –Term One survey*

*Due to the reasons already provided. It feels like this CPD course is offered without the practicalities being considered. This course is often undertaken by individuals working full-time, where clear, in advance communications would be appreciated, but this is often not factored in. –Term Three survey*

*I would like to highlight that while the academic side is excellent the administration of part time and CPD students is poor. This is mainly due to poor communication and an expectation that our needs are the same as a full time student. As an example - not giving proper notice on module dates and other lectures is poor, we need to deconflict these dates with our full time jobs. I also had an enrolment error which I tried to get rectified, was assured this had happened, and then I was almost unenrolled before I completed my course because my requested enrolment change had not in fact been actioned. While all the individuals who I interacted with were very supportive and pleasant this is a serious oversight. My degree sponsorship is dependent upon me completing it, if I don't complete it I have to pay the money back immediately. When I raised the discrepancy the department had no records of the error or the change and I had to dig out old emails proving I was in the right. –Term Three survey*

Other marginalised groups within the postgraduate taught community like commuter students, those with work commitments or caring responsibilities have more difficulty adjusting their schedules to accommodate last-minute changes.

*We were initially told we would have 2 days of teaching but this was changed to 3 full days for the first month. It wasn't a problem for me but I know a fellow student who has child care arrangement was stressed having to make last minute changes to their child care. –Term One survey*

*I think the university could consider the wider needs of postgraduate students to include those with children. –Term One survey*

Departments and University administrators should not assume all students live within a close proximity to Royal Holloway and be studying full-time. All communications about the course should be relayed in a timely manner to accommodate the various needs for all students. The University should additionally investigate whether the current timetabling software is fit for purpose and assess whether a better alternative may be available for use. As a short-term solution, the University should work with departments to identify best practice in this area, such as the use of provisional timetables when selecting modules.

Improvements in the timetable software may additionally reduce inconsistencies and errors students encountered during assessments. Students discussed the negative impact of having incorrect assessment information like dates and locations for in-person exams had on their student experience. Students also explained there were other inconsistencies online with Moodle and Turnitin deadlines not matching assessment dates they were provided.

*Admin staff completely got exam timetable and locations wrong. When questioned wasn't fixed straight away. Exam halls were still wrong once they said it was amended and had to speak to adjudicators on the day to actually find out where I was to sit my exam. Massively added to stress levels. –Term One survey*

*One of my exam locations were changed and I was not notified! I have Reasonable Adjustments and it was taken in isolation. It caused stress on the morning of the exam as i turned up at the wrong location. There was about 10-minutes of uncertainty whilst the exam overseer made enquiries and I had to run across campus to the new location to start on time. Caused GREAT STRESS right before an already stressful exam. I had not received any e-mail about the change when I was told I should have. I didn't, I double checked. Something went wrong, I understand these things went wrong but I didn't appreciate the additional stress, the indifferent attitude of RHUL admin staff who were quick to say it's not their fault! Over it now. –Term Three survey*

*Moodle and Turnitin dates for deadlines not matching up on several occasions. Caused some issues with scheduling my work. Nothing major though and some lecturers lenient with this due to mistakes. –Term Three survey*

Errors around assessments add an additional layer of pressure to an already high-stress situation for postgraduate taught students. Schools and department should ensure that postgraduate taught students receive their exam schedules by a set date to ensure students have enough time to prepare for the assessment. Times, locations and dates should be correct and up to date when students receive this information. To avoid confusion, any changes that might occur should be done in a timely manner *before* the assessment date and should be communicated to students both in person and in writing

to ensure they receive the updated information. We will discuss students' experiences with workload, assessment and feedback in more detail later in this report.

Finally, there were instances in the survey where students complained about being misled about the location they would study at, and the consequences this misunderstanding about the location of their course had on their student experience. Disappointment was most seen with students who were under the impression that they would study at the Egham Campus but were instead placed at Royal Holloway's London Campus. Last minute changes to a campus location can have potentially disastrous consequences, especially if students have sourced housing based near the campus they expected to receive teaching. An unexpected commute can add additional, unexpected costs and stresses to the degree. The University should clearly identify in each postgraduate course prospectus whether teaching for that course will occur at the Egham or London Campus. This information should be uploaded to the main University website by a set date each academic year. Providing definite information about the teaching location for a course will give students accurate information about their course and allow them to make a conscious decision around housing and whether they want to study at that campus before accepting their place on the course.

Despite the above issues, 90.09 per cent of September respondents in the Term One survey felt their course was well organised and running smoothly. Students who answered no highlighted many of the issues discussed above like enrolment problems and timetable issues. Some students mentioned block mode teaching was not always planned well or considerate of part-time students' schedules. In Term Three there was a decrease of 10.34 percentage points to this question, and only 79.95 per cent of September respondents felt this way about their course.

#### C5. January Starters Course Structure

January starters were asked the same question in the Term Three survey, and 70 per cent of students felt their course was well organised and running smoothly. This is likely a result of the above issues as well as other more specific incidents related to that cohort's course structure and communication. As mentioned, confusion about the different models raised in our Term Two focus group in March highlighted this was an area of concern for this group of students. In January 2023 Royal Holloway split the January cohort into two separate models which are outlined below:

- Model One: This model is ordered the same as the September cohort where students undergo two terms of teaching, a term or period of assessment and, finally, a term or period for the dissertation with a submission date in early December. All pre-2023 January students followed this pattern.
- Model Two: This model is structured slightly differently with one term of teaching, a term or period of assessment, a term or period for the dissertation with a submission date in early-September and, finally, a second term of teaching which finishes in early-December.

We had some concerns following our Term Two focus group that January students did not fully understand their course structure, and we reached out to the University that evening for clarification on the different dissertation deadlines and to inform staff there was a proportion of students convinced they were paying for a postgraduate taught degree which included only one term of teaching and the dissertation with nothing else

following their submission. The University responded promptly and informed the Students' Union that communications would be sent to the School of Business and Management and School of Engineering, Physical and Mathematical Sciences to ensure students on the Model Two track understood their different dates for teaching and assessment. Our discussion with this student during the focus group led us to wonder how many other January students were confused about their degree timeline, and we decided to include a few questions about the separate models and students' satisfaction with their different course structures in our Term Three survey. The tables below present the results.

What Model structure are you undertaking for your PGT course?		
Overall % of respondents (12 responses)		
Model One	Model Two	I don't know what my model is
25	58.33	16.67

Table 65: Percentage of January postgraduate taught students by model, Term Three survey

In the survey we included an explanation of both models which included dissertation submission dates in case students did not know whether they were Model One or Two. Our Term Three survey ran at the end of April, and the results revealed there was one student, and possibly more in the cohort who did not participate in the survey, who did not know which model they were a part of four months into studying. Confusion around the course structure and January timeline was not only represented in this student's response. A January student who was a part of the Model One track brought up communication failures from their department in comments around teaching in the summer: 'Administration is never able to answer any questions (e.g. do we have lectures during summer term?)' January students on the Model One track did have teaching in the summer term, which was set to begin in May while the survey was live. This comment further underpins there is a real lack of communication around January timelines for postgraduate taught students on both models.

We asked January students about their satisfaction with their model structure, and the table below presents the results from the survey.

How satisfied are you with the structure of your PGT model in terms of teaching, assessment and dissertation timelines?					
Model	% of survey respondents in department (10 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very Unsatisfied
Model One	66.67	33.33	-	-	-
Model Two	42.86	28.57	28.57	-	-

Table 66: January student satisfaction with model structure, Term Three survey

The table above reveals satisfaction among the Model Two January students was lower than the Model One group, and the University should conduct a full review at the end

of the 2023-24 academic year which examines the experience of January postgraduate taught students who experienced the Model Two timeline. This review should consider whether students received information about the different structure of the course before enrolment, and whether submitting the dissertation before undertaking a second term of teaching was positively received by students.

The insight we gained from the survey and focus group about the January course structure revealed there is potentially a huge gap in knowledge around January teaching dates, the dissertation or major project's submission and what exactly their course fees were covering in terms of length of study. The University should include a list of separate term dates for January starters on their main University website, the Student Intranet and the Royal Holloway App. This list of dates should include students' start date, teaching terms and the general dissertation deadlines for both January models. There is currently no central information page for January postgraduate taught students where they can look up key dates for their degree, and this should be remedied as soon as possible to avoid confusion about the length and structure of the course.

On this same page, the University should include a clear explanation about the two different January models, and the University should be more transparent about which courses are assigned to each model on the prospectus for January starters. Communicating this information more clearly would allow prospective students to better understand the structure of the course before making a final decision on whether to enrol at Royal Holloway with a January start date. Some students might not want to submit a dissertation before they complete both terms of teaching, and the lack of information about the different model timelines could be considered misleading and have a real impact on a student's decision to undertake a postgraduate taught degree at Royal Holloway.

The lack of information around the January models and different term structures really highlighted there is an absence of easily available and centralised information around the postgraduate taught degree in general. Trying to learn more about the variables of the degree was time-consuming and required navigating the main Royal Holloway website to find information about the different postgraduate taught degrees by department. There was no easy way to discover which courses allowed block mode learning without process of elimination or which courses were taught on the Egham Campus versus the London Campus. Having a central information point on the main University website which holds all this information in a more streamlined manner, including a calendar for events like induction or postgraduate Careers Fair would be extremely beneficial for current and prospective postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway. The University should consider creating a postgraduate taught student hub on the main University website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App. This could be set up in a similar vein to the Doctoral school website where postgraduate taught students could find all relevant information about their course in a single place. A webpage like this could streamline important information for September and January students.

## C6. Postgraduate Taught Teaching and Contact Hours

Teaching was another area of the postgraduate taught student experience we tracked over the course of the Policy Inquiry. In our Term One and Term Three surveys we asked

September and January students a series of questions about their satisfaction with teaching and contact time between staff and students. The Students' Union is very aware teaching was dramatically different when industrial action was called by the University and College Union (UCU) in Term Two and Three of the 2022-23 academic year. This section will discuss students' experience and satisfaction with teaching both before and after the UCU strikes. The table below presents September respondents' answers about teaching and contact time in our Term One survey.

Student satisfaction questions for teaching	% of September respondents (117 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the quality of teaching on your course?	32.48	47.01	12.82	6.84	0.85
How satisfied are you with the contact time (face to face and/or online) between staff and students?	41.03	41.03	9.40	7.69	0.85

*Table 67: September student satisfaction with quality of teaching and contact time with staff, Term One survey*

Overall, 79.49 per cent of September respondents were satisfied to an extent with the quality of teaching on their course during Term One. 13 departments which offered teaching for the postgraduate taught degree had a combined satisfaction rating of 75 per cent or higher, and none scored below 35 per cent satisfaction.<sup>12</sup> There were 58 student comments that elaborated on the reasons for their satisfaction rating, of which 42 respondents were satisfied to an extent. The table below presents recurring themes found in the student comments about their experiences with teaching in Term One.

Teaching Satisfaction Discussion Themes	
Theme	% of September comments (58 responses)
Positive comments about academic staff	31.03
Course material is interesting	22.41
Teaching could be improved	24.14
Course material could be improved	15.52
Other	6.90

*Table 68: Teaching satisfaction discussion themes, Term One survey*

<sup>12</sup> The Physics Department had two satisfaction ratings with one student who answered 'Neutral' and the other selected 'unsatisfied', which is below the 35 per cent threshold. However, as these scores were from MScR students, the data reveals that no department with postgraduate taught students had a satisfaction rating below 50 per cent. Only one MScR student elaborated on their experience in the free text option and stated, 'more support and teaching hours, there is too much independent study, I feel I still need a lot of guidance. You clearly lack on that'.

31.03 per cent of the comments discussed students' positive experiences with academic staff and the ways lecturers were knowledgeable, approachable, and friendly. Students maintained in the comments that they enjoyed the course and content because of their positive experiences with teaching.

*So far, I have had the most interesting and engaging tutors on my course that clearly hold passion for their subject which becomes reflected in their teaching. Really uplifting and made the issues with my modules not seem as bad.*

*Lectures and seminars are conducted by passionate experts that make the content very engaging and well explained.*

*Quality of teaching is excellent, the reading lists are also very sufficient as they are very useful for the modules.*

22.41 per cent of the comments around teaching satisfaction highlighted students' positive opinions about the course material in their modules. Some students used the space to discuss where there could be improvements like more detailed reading lists, better lecture structures and slides, and they would like more contact time. These issues, however, did not negatively impact their overall feelings about the course, and students maintained in the comments they were still satisfied with the quality of their teaching in Term One.

*I think the modules are designed pretty well to include content that is interesting and challenging and at the same time very relevant to the current market.*

*The course material are very relevant to the industry standards, lectures conducted by industrial experts helps to understand the skills that we need to develop.*

*The lectures, barring one module, have been engaging so far. It would be preferable to have more interactive sessions by using online resources like Kahoot, etc.*

*The professors are really nice - approachable, friendly, knowledgeable - but we could have done with more hours of lectures instead of just 10 per week.*

*The module leaders are great, but the way the course is structured (4 weeks of lectures, and only meeting once a week) makes everything very rushed. It would be better to have each module be the length of a full term so we have more time with each module leader.*

24.14 per cent of the comments stated the quality of their teaching could be improved. Recurring comments mentioned teaching was average, the staff were unapproachable and they did not respond to emails.

*Some lecturers were late for their lessons, and some were unreachable in response to email queries when they explicitly solicited for email queries. Slides were not available for some modules until very much later.*

*Some of the lecturers are still simply reading off slides which doesn't seem satisfactory at masters level. If this is the case, a pre recording could be send out prior to the lecture and then extra bits/discussion in the lecture. The course material has been largely focused especially for statistics on material Learnt at*

*undergraduate degree. What is the point of requiring statistics and research methods for BPS accreditation at undergrad to just repeat it all again at masters. They said the research methods would be applied to clinical but it's not at all.*

*Some modules assume knowledge and are not very teaching focused, instead more student lead which is difficult for me having come from a different undergrad degree and needing maybe a bit more instruction.*

15.52 per cent of the comments argued the course material could be improved. Recurring comments mentioned the course was outdated, they would prefer more online resources, better lecture slides and they consider the material to be a repeat of the undergraduate degree rather than postgraduate level.

*Teaching us undergraduate content seems like a waste of money. Doing first year statistics is a joke.*

*As put in previous answer, outdated data being taught, lecturers who laugh off that they can't remember basics when they are meant to be the experts in their field, coursework dates changing with no notification and we as students have to chose lecturers for an update as to why the release date hasn't been complied with! This is not what a master's programme should look like.*

*Courses seem repetitive to undergrad.*

6.90 per cent of the comments mentioned 'Other' issues like the UCU strikes and the disruption it has on their learning while another student maintained it was too early in their study to assess the quality of their teaching.

We wanted to learn more about student engagement and participation during teaching, and we asked students in our Term One survey how much they agreed with the following statement: 'I have been encouraged to ask questions and contribute to class discussions during taught lectures' and/or seminars (face to face and/or online)'. 88.79 per cent of respondents answered they agreed to an extent. Most student comments about their engagement in class were positive with students explaining the ways their modules was interactive due to smaller class sizes and room set up with roundtable discussions. Students also stated their lecturers and seminar leaders encouraged students to participate in class and ask questions.

*My course is very interactive which I appreciate. We are encouraged to shae our ideas and have productive discussions.*

*As a small cohort your voice is definitely heard.*

*Lecture discussion are open room conversation where I can put forth ideas and build on the views of others.*

*Some lectures do this, other just want to read off slides.*

Overall, 82.06 per cent of September students were satisfied to an extent with the contact time between staff and students in our Term One survey. 12 departments had a combined satisfaction rate of 75 per cent or higher and no departments scored below 50 per cent. There were 35 students who chose to further discuss their satisfaction rating around contact time. 21 students stated they were satisfied, and many of the comments listed class schedules, the number of teaching hours and quick response

time to emails as reasons for their positive rating. Students additionally mentioned staff were friendly and helpful which made it easier to contact staff when they needed to.

*The professors are friendly and approachable. They put lots of efforts to clear the concepts and respond to queries.*

*The lecturers provide both online and in person drop in sessions for extra help which has been helpful.*

*My tutor is good at putting on informal tutorials but if she wasn't prepared to go above and beyond I would struggle.*

There were 13 student comments which explored the reasons students answered they were unsatisfied with contact time. Common complaints listed were there was not enough classroom hours, scheduled were too packed on certain days and students would prefer more evenly spread classroom hours across the week. Other issues cited were not enough meetings with academic staff, and more remote learning options to attend lectures via teams or being provided with lecture recordings. Finally, one student specifically cited having difficulties with the contact time because of their part-time status: 'Made very difficult for part time students, no longer allowed to do seminars on Microsoft Teams and modules will be randomly placed across different days. Makes it difficult when you have other work commitments'. Below is a selection of student comments from our Term One survey which discuss contact time.

*It is slightly disappointing to come halfway across the world to complete a Masters and only have lectures twice a week. Our Wednesdays are very full and this could have been spread out to allow for addition face-to-face teaching days.*

*Make studying more accessible to those that commute. I.e, don't end day 1 at 6pm and start day 2 at 9am, let alone have it run until 6pm that day too*

*We could have done with more hours of lectures instead of just 10 per week.*

*Decent amount of time but the timetable is awful. 7/8 hours in one day in the same room is draining and doesn't allow productive conversation after a couple of hours. Also it is all on a Wednesday so I have been completely excluded from my sports team which is most of the reason I stayed at RHUL.*

These repeated requests to spread teaching out more evenly across the week occurred in all our surveys for the project. Student dissatisfaction with the number of contact hours with staff and the total number of teaching hours each week was another recurring issue in all three surveys, and Schools and departments should consider whether postgraduate taught students have reduced access to professional and academic staff in comparison to undergraduates and postgraduate research students.

At Royal Holloway, most postgraduate taught teaching occurs twice a week for most full-time students, however, some postgraduate taught courses have the option for students to attend as block mode on campus, which allows individuals, usually in full-time work, to study one module in a single intensive week. Students are then only required to be on campus during the weeks that module runs. Student satisfaction with block mode study was mixed as seen in the selected comments below from our Term One and Term Three surveys.

*Part-time structure change would have significantly improved my experience (learning and social connection to student group) - 2 days regularly throughout the year, rather than on / off full-time intensive module followed by total break. –Term Three survey*

*Look at the optional modules that are available - this year there are 2 block mode modules available, one of which I did last year, which puts me in an awkward place as the other module is something I am not interested in. If you are unable to offer optional modules in block mode, this should be made clear from the start rather than advertising a wide range of modules. –Term One survey*

*The CPD courses feel rushed, to the point it is clear that it is weekly mode material forced into a week's study. This typically causes areas of the syllabus to be skipped or not enough time to ask questions during contact hours. –Term Three survey*

The University, Schools and departments should review whether block mode teaching is fit for purpose and the best course structure for postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway, and whether students undergoing block mode learning are receiving the same support as other postgraduate taught students who are attending class weekly.

In Term Two, the UCU announced there would be 18 days of strike action which would take place between 1 February and 22 March. The UCU had a re-ballot in March and announced in April that their mandate to strike would be renewed for a further six months, and a marking and assessment boycott was implemented at Royal Holloway on 20 April—one week before we launched our Term Three survey. Members of the UCU who chose to participate in the marking and assessment boycott could refuse to undertake marking or assessment duties which included setting, marking and providing feedback on exams, coursework and dissertations until 30 September. Students undertaking postgraduate taught degrees during the 2022-23 academic year could have been negatively impacted by the marking and assessment boycott for any Term Two and Three coursework they submitted, and at the time of the survey there was uncertainty around what would happen during exam periods in Term Three and their dissertation at the end of the degree.

It was unsurprising to learn that satisfaction with teaching and contact time both saw a decrease for September starters in our Term Three survey following this period of industrial action, and the survey results for the September group are presented below.

Student satisfaction questions for teaching	% of September respondents (81 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the quality of teaching on your course?	25.93	48.15	17.28	7.41	1.23
Excluding the UCU strikes, how satisfied are you with the contact time (face to face and/or online) between staff and students	33.33	40.74	11.11	13.58	1.23

Table 69: September student satisfaction with teaching and contact time, Term Three survey

74.08 per cent of September respondents were satisfied to an extent with the quality of their teaching which was a decrease of 6.55 percentage points from Term One. 74.07 per cent of respondents were satisfied to an extent with their contact time which was a decrease of 7.99 percentage points. For both questions, the most noticeable difference in satisfaction ratings were decreases in answers for 'very satisfied' and an increase in 'neutral' and 'unsatisfied' responses. For both questions, only nine departments had a combined satisfaction rating of 75 per cent or higher, and one department scored below 35 per cent satisfaction.

For January starters, 83.34 per cent of respondents were satisfied to an extent with the quality of teaching on their course, and 75 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the contact time (face to face and/or online) between staff and students during their first Term of teaching in Term Three of the main academic year. The table below presents the overall results for both questions.

Student satisfaction questions for teaching	% of January survey respondents (12 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the quality of teaching on your course?	41.67	41.67	-	8.33	8.33
Excluding the UCU strikes, how satisfied are you with the contact time (face to face and/or online) between staff and students	33.33	41.67	16.67	-	8.33

Table 70: January student satisfaction with teaching and contact time, Term Three survey

Many of the comments in our Term Three survey about students' satisfaction with the quality of their teaching mirrored what was stated in Term One—staff were knowledgeable and engaging, some modules and lecturers were better than others, the course content was interesting and informative. Areas of improvement continued to be a lack of teaching hours for some modules, poor organisation and time management from lecturers, last-minute deadlines for assessments and coursework, a lack of practical components in the course and, finally, more support from teaching staff. Below is a mixture of student comments from both September and January starters which discuss their positive and negative experiences with teaching and contact time with staff in the Term Three survey.

*Excellent teaching! The staff are so friendly and approachable, I feel like part of this wider academic team.*

*I have conducted 4 modules. 2 the quality was very high, the material was interesting, relevant and challenging and the lecturers were engaged, knowledgeable and helpful. Unfortunately, 2 others were less quality, the teaching was not supportive, felt rushed and communication was difficult.*

*The course teaching was not as challenging as I expected, I thought there would have been more practical cases and useful material to use in the corporate world.*

*Very mixed experience. Some teaching has been excellent, other parts have been poor. Some lecture content was poorly organised and not explained particularly*

*well. Lecture slides were pretty rarely made available prior to lectures, reading lists hadn't been updated in years, e.g. However, some classes have been excellent and extremely well taught.*

*Generally good. Two days of contact time works well. For some modules, three hours in one go was a little intense and I fear might have limited student engagement.*

*According to me, the constant change of teaching staff for every lecture was extremely confusing and hard for me to keep up. Some of the teaching from the guest lectures were just not up to the standard. I felt the staff weren't able to adequately handle a huge class and sometimes we couldn't hear what the teacher was saying. They would also just read the information off slides and would just make an in-person class redundant.*

It is impossible to discuss teaching without mentioning the impact industrial action had on students' experiences with teaching in Terms Two and Three. Students in our Term Two focus group really emphasised how they supported the strikes, but they were extremely honest with the negative effects the strikes had had on their student experience. The reduced contact hours was a huge loss when undertaking a one-year degree. We included questions about the UCU strikes in our Term Three survey, and we have presented the results by start date and study status to present a stronger picture of how these strikes impacted different communities within the postgraduate taught cohort.

Do you support the UCU strikes?		
Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
September (81)	66.67	33.33
January (12)	50	50

Table 71: Per cent of overall respondents and whether they support the UCU strikes, Term Three survey

Has your PGT experience been impacted by the UCU strikes this academic year?		
Cohort and number of respondents	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
September (81)	55.56	44.44
January (12)	33.33	66.67

Table 72: Per cent of overall respondents who have been impacted by the UCU strikes, Term Three survey

A larger proportion of September starters answered their student experience had been impacted by industrial action in comparison to January students. We wondered whether this was a result of student perception—January students had only experience teaching during a period of industrial action and had nothing else to compare it with in contrast to the September group. This is a possibility, but we also took a deeper look at

students' responses at a department level and the January respondents were all members of departments with which were less impacted by strike action for the September cohort.

A larger proportion of full-time students from the September cohort answered they had been impacted by the UCU strikes in comparison to part-time students. One part-time student maintained they were not impacted by the strikes because they were a block mode student, and their teaching was scheduled around the strikes. Students who undertook courses on a weekly basis were more likely to see a larger loss of contact hours in comparison to block mode students. The table below presents the results for September respondents based on their study status.

Has your PGT experience been impacted by the UCU strikes this academic year?		
% September of respondents (81 responses)		
Mode of study	Yes	No
Full time	58.33	41.67
Part time	33.33	66.67

*Table 73: Per cent of September respondents who have been impacted by the UCU strikes by study status, Term Three survey*

We asked students to explain the ways the UCU strike had affected their student experience, and we received 42 comments from the September group, of which 34 respondents had answered their experience had been impacted. One January respondent filled out the free-text response and stated, 'in a good way', but did not elaborate further. The table below presents recurring themes raised by September starters about their experiences with industrial action.

Teaching Satisfaction Discussion Themes	
Theme	% of September comments (42 responses)
Missed teaching hours	61.90
Issues contacting staff / accessing material	16.67
Delayed feedback	16.67
No significant issues	16.67
Supported the strikes	11.90
Other	16.67

*Table 74: Impact of UCU strikes discussion themes for September students, Term Three survey*

Missed teaching hours was the most cited issue provided by students in the comments, and students mentioned they missed both lectures and seminars throughout the period of industrial action. Difficulties around contacting staff and accessing learning material

were the second most common issues discussed by students in the comment section. Students explained there were often problems reaching staff around deadlines, and there were usually long delays, or no response, to emails. There were also multiple instances where international student discussed their feelings around having to pay higher fees and it added another layer to the loss. Delayed feedback was another recurring issue mentioned by students. Below are a selection of comments from our Term Three survey.

*Classes have been cancelled and lecturers have not been responding to emails.*

*In the case of [module redacted], we missed 5 lectures out of ten.*

*While I understand and support the reason behind the UCU strikes, I feel as students its unfair for us to bear the brunt of it. We weren't able to get in touch with our personal tutors/dissertation supervisors as they were on strike and now with our marks being withheld, I feel this is extremely unfair and not an ideal education experience especially since we pay double the fee as we are international students.*

*Somewhat. As mentioned, we have few hours of teaching per week. To lose out on that when we're paying such high fees is unfortunate.*

*Seminars cancelled, assessment feedback was not easy to chat through as they had no time, so gave level of anxiety.*

*The strikes have affected the grades not being given at the promised time. If we are supposed to follow a deadline for assignments and exams then I do believe that the teaching staff must also adhere to the same deadline for marking the assessments. I have paid double the amount as fees, as an international student and the quality of education did not live up to it's [sic] standard.*

Students who reported having little to no issue during the period of industrial action stated it was because they were part-time students, or the strike days did not affect their classes because of their timetables. There were also instances where students said the impact on their experience was minimal when they experienced disruption.

*My lecturers were only timetabled for Monday and Tuesday, meaning I was not affected by the strikes which were always planned for later in the week.*

*Our lecturers did what they could to avoid impacting the masters too much - some results were handed back late but other than that we haven't been affected too much.*

Other issues discussed by students were a desire for financial compensation for lost teaching hours, their experience did not live up to the standards they expected due to the strikes and they would have liked reschedule classes. It is important to note that, despite the strike disruptions, many students used the space to acknowledge they support the teachers who chose to strike in Term Two, and there was recognition that academic staff tried to minimise the impact where they were able.

## C7. Research Skills and Development

Postgraduate taught students are expected to develop their critical research and enquiry skills while studying. Students are expected by the end of the degree to have access to a wide range of research techniques and methodologies, and postgraduate

taught students should be able to plan and implement their work to a greater level than they did in the undergraduate degree. There is also an additional layer of autonomy in their study where they are expected to take more responsibility in their learning and research development.<sup>13</sup> The Students' Union wanted to gain insight into this element of the degree, and we asked students an array of questions in our Term One and Three surveys about their satisfaction with the resources and access to IT equipment at Royal Holloway as well as their experiences with research development.

In our Term One survey we asked September starters the following question: 'Does the University provide you with suitable resources and research space?'. 83.93 per cent of respondents answered yes, and 13 departments had 75 per cent of survey participants or more who answered yes. There was one department which had less than 35 per cent of respondents to say yes. Despite the high proportion of students who answered this way, student comments in the free-text response section to this question were more mixed. Students with who answered yes to the question maintained they had good access to both physical and online resources, they were supported by staff, they had good workstations and felt there was enough study spaces in the library and around the campus.

*The online library is good and in person library is excellent. Working spaces are also excellent—I never struggle to find a seat in the library.*

*Library is the place where I spend most of my time. It is a good environment to study. Especially I like silent study and study group facilities. Also, library offers a huge database of relevant books that comes handy in doing the assignments.*

*I have come across a lot of spaces other than library where one can study.*

*I am usually stationed at the library and it is well equipped and quite spacious and enough capacity. There is a good choice of academic books both online and offline.*

Students who felt the resources and working space provided by the University were lacking argued there was not enough study space on campus and in the library. There were also recurring requests for a dedicated postgraduate taught student study space because the library was often busy or used for socialising rather than for work. There were a handful of additional complaints from students, for example, some rooms for lectures were dark and cold with bad acoustics. There was also a request for more technical support and specific software. Finally, a satellite classroom in Central London was declared not suitable for lessons.

*There is a room for post grads but it has changed to only be for research postgrad which isn't ideal because there is nowhere for postgrad taught students to work. The library is nearly always full of undergrads and it's hard to concentrate.*

*As we are making physical and digital creative work it would be good to have technical support.*

*My course requires producing media content, but we are not provided with studios or Adobe pack for editing.*

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<sup>13</sup> QAA Scotland, 'What is mastersness?' (July 2013) <[https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/what-is-mastersness.pdf?sfvrsn=3a47f581\\_12](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/what-is-mastersness.pdf?sfvrsn=3a47f581_12)> [accessed 2 March 2022] (p. 5).

*There could be more study spaces, especially for post-grad taught students. The library and other locations are always packed and loud.*

We followed up this question in our Term One survey and asked students about their satisfaction with the IT and library resources and services at Royal Holloway. The table below presents the results to this question.<sup>14</sup>

Student satisfaction questions for IT and library resources	% of survey respondents (112 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
How satisfied are you with the IT and library resources and services?	45.54	47.32	2.68	1.79	-

*Table 75: Per cent of survey respondents' satisfaction with IT and library resources, Term One survey*

92.86 per cent of respondents answered they were satisfied to an extent, and the majority of comments in the free-text response section were positive. Students mentioned they received good support by IT staff, the remote induction sessions were helpful, they had access to good online resources and there were enough study spaces. Where there were complaints, students stated there were issues with Wi-Fi, not enough study spaces, not enough resources, a lack of resources at the London Campus and too many logins for Microsoft Office. Below is a selection of student comments from September students, which explain their satisfaction rating about the IT and library resources at Royal Holloway in Term One.

*The online library is good, albeit with a smaller catalogue than my undergraduate university. Access to a variety of online journals is also helpful.*

*The library induction remote session was very good. I haven't had to deal much with IT so can't comment on their service yet.*

*IT helpdesk is really helpful and quick in resolving queries and the library services are good.*

*The books that are relevant to my courses this term are not available at London Campus, where my courses are taught. I had to specially travel to Egham to get them.*

*Occasionally certain resources aren't available.*

*The logins for O365 are too frequent - they could be monthly without loss of security. Luckily I am able to access the Senate House and National Poetry Libraries as only having library access in Egham would be insufficient*

In our Term Three survey we wanted to students to reflect on their research development skills since embarking on the course. The table below presents the results for September survey respondents.

<sup>14</sup> During the survey build an additional response of 'not applicable' was accidentally added to this satisfaction question, and 2.68 per cent of students chose this answer.

Student agreement questions about research skills	% of September respondents (79 responses)				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel like my research skills have developed and improved while undertaking the course at Royal Holloway'.	34.18	45.57	12.66	6.33	1.27
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel more confident and capable in my ability to communicate information in a variety of forms (e.g. oral presentations, group discussions, essays and/or exams) because of the course'.	27.85	44.30	18.99	6.33	2.53

*Table 76: Per cent of September respondents' satisfaction with research development, Term Three survey*

We broke down the survey responses by student status to see if there were any significant differences between full- and part-time students or by fee status, and we learned that 82.86 per cent of full-time students agree to an extent that their research skills have developed and improved compared to 55.56 per cent of part-time students. In terms of fee status, it was comparable with 82.35 per cent of Home students agreeing to an extent, 75 per cent of EU students and 78.04 per cent of international students. Student agreement about their confidence and ability to communicate information in a variety of forms had a slower percentage of agreement for some groups. 74.29 per cent of full-time students agreed to an extent with this statement compared to 55.56 per cent of part-time students, and 73.53 per cent of Home students agreed to an extent compared to 75 per cent of EU students and 70.78 per cent of international students.

This question was opened to January starters in the same survey, and the Students' Union was aware the responses could be lower due to their shorter period of study. The combined agreement scores for 'definitely agree' and 'agree' were comparable to the September cohort, however, the proportion of students who answered 'definitely disagree' was higher. Unfortunately, no January students explained their satisfaction rating in the free-text response option. The scores for the January cohort are presented in the table below.

Student agreement questions	% of January respondents (11 responses)				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel like my research skills have developed and improved while undertaking the course at Royal Holloway'.	54.54	27.27	9.09	-	9.09
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel more confident and capable in my ability to communicate information in a variety of forms (e.g. oral presentations, group discussions, essays and/or exams) because of the course'.	27.27	45.45	18.18	-	9.09

Table 77: Per cent of January respondents' satisfaction with research development, Term Three survey

30 September respondents explained the ways their research skills had or had not developed and improved while undertaking the degree at Royal Holloway. 76.67 per cent of the comments came from students who agreed to an extent. Most of these comments had overarching statements that the course and academic staff had helped improve students' research skills, however, one student specifically mentioned accessing CEDAS had provided support. 23.33 per cent of the comments were from students who answered they were neutral about, or disagreed with, this statement. Examples given by students who felt their research skills had remained unchanged mentioned they already used these skills in the workplace, they had not done any research yet because they were unmotivated by the course, one student listed poor teaching as a reason, and one student explained their part-time status meant they had not had the chance to work on this area. Below is a selection of student comments showcasing students' different experiences in this area of study in our Term Three survey.

*I have been out of education for sometime so needed to learn new approaches to research some from trial and error. I would have benefitted from more research skills and resource guidance but am enjoying the challenge.*

*Just the nature of the course means I feel much more confident in my research skills then I did in my undergraduate.*

*I research the same as I did at undergrad level and haven't been taught anything.*

*I feel that with the support of the staff my research has greatly developed and I feel more confident in my writing.*

*A lot of the modules have had an essay as part of the assessments so I'm constantly improving my research skills. I'm anticipating that working on my*

*independent business project over the summer will also improve my research skills further.*

*This is not my first MSc, I also use these skills in my full time job.*

*There has not been much active teaching or opportunity for formative practice of these skills.*

There were 31 free-text responses from students when they were asked to discuss their agreement rating about their confidence and ability to communicate information in a variety of forms. 64.51 per cent of the comments came from students who agreed to an extent. Students who agreed mentioned they had been given opportunities in lectures, during group work, exams and coursework to improve confidence and communication skills. There were instances where students also mentioned the ability to choose their own research topics gave them the chance to further develop in this area on their own. 35.48 per cent of student comments came from respondents who answered their feelings were neutral or they disagreed with this statement. Reasons students gave were that they already use many of these skills in their job, there was still a lot to learn, there was little or no opportunities for group discussions or presentations, being part-time and block mode created a barrier to learning new techniques, and there was a correlation with grades and vague feedback negatively impacting their confidence. Below is a selection of student responses which present students' experiences in this area of their study from our Term Three survey.

*A range of assessments have been used this year to develop different writing and communication styles.*

*I expected there to be a lot more presentations in-person during this course. There have hardly been any in-person presentations, although I think it's a very important skill to have and should be included in most, if not all, modules.*

*I hated doing presentations and public speaking before but have improved drastically.*

*We haven't had any group interactions, so there has been no test of my ability to communicate in group discussions/ oral presentations.*

*There is not an opportunity during CPD mode to learn using a variety of techniques.*

*Although I am studying seriously, I still do not have confidence about those abilities.*

A later section of this report will look at the Dissertation or Major Project more closely and discuss the ways students received further support in this area from their supervisors.

## C8. Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and Feedback was another area of the degree we tracked throughout the Policy Inquiry, and we asked students to comment on their experiences in these areas in more detail in our Term One and Term Three surveys. We asked students in our Term One survey whether they found the workload manageable, and 76.79 per cent of

September starters answered yes. The table below presents the department breakdown for student responses. Blue highlight denotes 75 per cent of students or more in a department who answered the question and found their workload manageable. A red highlight represents that 35 per cent of student respondents or less found the workload manageable.

Have you found the workload manageable (112 responses)					
Department	% of respondents		Department	% of respondents	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Business and Management	88.46	11.54	History	72.73	27.27
Classics	100	-	Information Security	85.71	14.29
Computer Science	25	75	Law	100	-
Earth Sciences	100	-	Media Arts	100	-
Economics	33.33	66.67	Music	80	20
Electronic Engineering	100	-	Physics	-	100
English	100	-	PIR	20	80
Geography	100	-	Psychology	80	20
Health Studies	83.33	16.67			

Table 78: Per cent of September respondents' who found the workload manageable Term One survey

We received 38 free text responses from students who chose to elaborate on their workload, and the responses we received were mixed. 39.47 per cent of the comments maintained there was no issue with the amount of workload because deadlines were spread out and the material was not too difficult. There were also a proportion of student comments who acknowledged they were able to tackle the workload more easily because they studied full-time and did not have to balance their studies with work commitments. 21.05 per cent of the comments raised issues around deadlines, for example, some academic staff assigned work and expected a very short turn-around for submission or there were issues with deadline stacking across modules. 18.42 per cent of the comments discussed students' perceptions that there was too much work, and many students stated they had difficulty juggling coursework. Other reasons listed by students were issues with poor time management, the material is too easy for some courses, the material is too complex, or they were unhappy with the distribution of assessment weights for the module. Finally, there were instances where part-time students discussed their poor work-life balance, especially the pressure of deadlines with family life or the unfair expectation that block mode students should submit work in the same amount of time as students who study weekly. Below is a selection of

student comments which present students' opinions about their workloads during Term One.

*This has varied between modules. Some modules give a good amount of time to allow workload to be balanced with work while some modules have given block mode students the same amount of time to do work as weekly students and it has been difficult to flex work schedule at short notice.*

*It's manageable, but the assessments could definitely be more spread out. When they're back to back (or two modules having very close deadlines so we have to work on them simultaneously) it becomes exhausting.*

*This term has been okay as assignments have been spread out which is good. We can engage as much or as little in reading as we decide.*

*Again, part time students are not considered at all when it comes to module planning (and cramming all deadlines into the same week after reading week).*

*A lot of assignments which is so stressful.*

*I feel comfortable with my workload however unlike lots of students, I'm not working a part time job which I feel is an area which is easily overlooked.*

*The course is intense as we are also combining starting a new job within the NHS. I'm currently working and studying 7 days a week to keep up with the workload.*

Administration errors around incorrect time, dates and room locations for exams have already been discussed in this report, but the issue of deadline stacking was also raised throughout various sections in our Term One and Term Three surveys like course organisation and timetabling. There were more student comments about this issue in our Term Three survey, and below is a selection of responses from September students in that survey which present some of the issues students experience around deadline stacking.

*Few students faced difficulty like continuous exams for three days. Whereas other students had break of three days for all exams. It may show some effect on students.*

*In December there were 3 assignments to submit almost all at the same time, it was difficult. I would suggest spreading those more, like starting some of them earlier.*

*The assessment deadlines were too close together during the month of March and it made performing at the best of my ability really difficult. It also added on to the stress and affected my mental health.*

*Term 2 gets very hectic with the amount of coursework and exams. They should've been lined up properly giving sufficient time to finish all to the best of our abilities instead to having them back-to-back.*

*Although they did not clash, we had 2 coursework deadlines (both 3000 words and worth 100% for our modules) and one exam all within 4 days. Which is a lot of stress to place on a student. [Department redacted] were very unsympathetic*

*about this, however [department redacted] quickly adjusted their hand in date to lessen our stress.*

The last comment presents a rare situation where a postgraduate taught student is registered for a degree that is run jointly by two departments at Royal Holloway. This scenario, however, reveals the separate decisions the two departments chose to make when confronted with the deadline stacking by the student. The first department chose not to change any of the dates whereas the second department adjusted the schedule when presented with the information. The latter's action is one which more departments should embrace to avoid academic burnout and has the potential to allow students the opportunity to perform better on their assessment. This situation could be avoided altogether, though, if School administration teams generate an annual report which scrutinises exam and assessment dates for postgraduate taught students to ensure clashes and stacking are avoided within departments and Schools. The University should adopt this practice across all Schools.

We additionally asked students in our Term One and Three surveys about feedback they receive on their work and whether they have been given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience with the course. The tables below present the results for student agreement around different elements of feedback and marking criteria from the September cohort in the Term One and Three surveys. We included a 'not applicable' answer for some of the questions for this theme in case there were instances where students had not been given marking criteria, the opportunity to submit coursework or had not yet received feedback from academic staff. Cells which have an 'x' indicate there was no 'not applicable' answer option for that question in the survey.

Student agreement questions	% of September survey respondents (112 responses)					
	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree	N/A
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Marking criteria is made clear in advance before submitting coursework and/or sitting an exam.'	41.96	33.93	16.96	3.57	0.89	2.68
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been returned in a reasonable amount of time'.	23.21	27.68	16.07	3.57	3.57	25.89
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been useful and has enhanced my academic ability since starting the course.'	23.21	35.71	9.82	1/79	2.68	26.79
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been given opportunities to provide feedback on my experience with the course, and I feel listened to by the department.'	36.61	32.14	20.54	9.82	0.89	X

Table 79: Per cent of September students' agreement with feedback, Term One survey

Student agreement questions	% of September survey respondents (79 responses)					
	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree	N/A
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Marking criteria is made clear in advance before submitting coursework and/or sitting an exam.'	34.18	41.77	11.39	10.13	2.53	x
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been returned in a reasonable amount of time'.	32.91	39.24	10.13	7.59	7.59	2.53
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been useful and has enhanced my academic ability since starting the course.'	27.85	39.24	15.19	12.66	2.53	2.53
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been given opportunities to provide feedback on my experience with the course, and I feel listened to by the department.'	29.11	40.51	17.72	8.86	3.80	x

*Table 80: Per cent of September students' agreement with feedback, Term Three survey*

September students' agreement around marking criteria and feedback had an increase across all four questions in our Term Three survey compared to Term One, although it should be noted that there was a huge decrease of over 20 percentage points in the not applicable category for the survey question, 'How much do you agree with the following statement? "Feedback on my work has been returned in a reasonable amount of time"'. 50.89 per cent of survey respondents agreed with this statement in our Term One survey compared to 72.15 per cent in our Term Three survey which was an increase of 21.26 percentage points. The second question which saw a decrease in the number of respondents for this category was the question, 'How much do you agree with the following statement? "Feedback on my work has been useful and has enhanced my academic ability since starting the course"'. 58.92 per cent of respondents agreed to an extent with this statement in our Term One survey which was an increase of 8.17 percentage points.

January students were given the opportunity to answer these questions in the Term Three survey, and the table below presents the results for this cohort.

Student agreement questions	% of January respondents (10 responses)					
	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree	N/A
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Marking criteria is made clear in advance before submitting coursework and/or sitting an exam.'	30	60	-	-	10	x
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been returned in a reasonable amount of time'.	-	40	30	20	10	-
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'Feedback on my work has been useful and has enhanced my academic ability since starting the course.'	10	40	30	10	10	-
How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been given opportunities to provide feedback on my experience with the course, and I feel listened to by the department.'	40	30	20	-	10	-

Table 81: Per cent of January students' agreement with feedback, Term Three survey

All four questions offered students the chance to explain the reason for their rating with a free-text response, and the remainder of this section will examine the September students' comments as there were no January students who elaborated on their experiences with marking criteria and feedback.

Student comments around marking criteria and whether it was clear were mixed with just under half of the students in both surveys maintaining marking criteria was readily available and explained by academic staff in the classroom or online. Student complaints about marking criteria often highlighted the information was too generic, it was inconsistent across modules in the same department and too subjective by academic staff. There were also instances in the Term One survey where students raised the issue that there was no written guidance about marking criteria for their course or it had not been explained to them. This was less of an issue in the Term Three survey, but there was an occurrence in the comments where a student stated there was no written guidance about the criteria and they had only received a verbal explanation. Below is a selection of student responses from the Term One and Three surveys which present their varying experiences around the clarity of marking criteria as a postgraduate taught student.

*All my modules have had class discussions about coursework before planning begins, and academics check in with us regularly to arrange 1-1s. –Term One survey,*

*Some modules leaders have very clear rubrics for each assessment, but some either don't have a rubric or the rubric is generic and not very helpful.–Term One survey*

*In many cases, we do not have more than the general marking tables. Further guidelines would be excellent to establish what is required for a post-grad essay. –Term One survey.*

*All the lecturers have give us a grading rubric before the assessments, although sometimes the rubric is very generic and not always helpful. –Term Three survey.*

*Some criteria is the same for different types of assessments which is unhelpful. –Term Three survey*

Student comments were also mixed when asked to explain their rating about whether they felt feedback on their work had been returned in a reasonable amount of time. There were 27 student comments in both the Term One and Term Three surveys, however, just over half of the comments from students in November who explained their rating had answered 'not applicable' or were neutral about whether they felt their feedback was returned in a timely manner. This was because they had not had the opportunity to submit work for feedback or they were still waiting for their marks. The remaining comments were split with students explaining their work was returned in the expected time frame, they had delayed or no feedback, or only a small amount of feedback on submitted work. These comments were repeated in our Term Three survey. Just under half the respondents maintained their feedback was timely, while slightly more than half repeated the same issues from Term One. There were also instances in the comment section which discussed the impact the UCU strikes had on receiving feedback from staff. Below is a selection of responses from the Term One and Term Three surveys about their experiences.

*All work I have submitted has been returned with comments in good time. –Term One survey.*

*Approx 20 working days is as expected and is perfectly fine for me. –Term One survey*

*Having submitted four big assignments so far, I still have not received any feedbacks or grades (it's currently mid-November and the term is nearly over). – Term One survey*

*This is again module specific. One of the modules this year was very poor and provided no feedback in the summative assessment and did not reply to emails on the module forum. –Term Three survey*

*For many pieces of work the actual return time has been at least 2 weeks past the stated return time. –Term Three survey*

*The feedback takes a very long time to get back. For assessments where the second one builds on the first one, it makes it difficult to know whether I was going in the right direction. –Term Three survey*

Students' discussion about their experiences with marking criteria and delays in receiving feedback highlights that departments should review marking criteria and whether deadlines to return feedback are consistent and being implemented correctly across all modules.

The perception of whether feedback on work was useful followed a similar pattern in the student comments. In Term One, the largest percentage of student comments came from students who answered 'not applicable' or were neutral because they had not submitted work or were waiting on marks. The remaining comments were mixed. Half of the students maintained the feedback they received was useful and detailed, which helped them improve their academic skills and subsequent work. The remaining student responses stated the feedback was vague and they would like further detail which explains where they can improve for the next assignment. There were also responses from students who stated they had still not received feedback on work submitted. In Term Three the comments were once again split down the middle. Students who had negative experiences with feedback once again claimed it was too generic, academic staff were inconsistent with their marks despite the criteria being the same, feedback did not match the grade they received, and they would like more opportunities to discuss feedback.

*Feedback has been detailed and specifically targeted areas to improve which I feel can implement into further work. –Term One survey*

*Sometimes the recommendations given (if there is a wrong answer) are vague, a little more clarity is expected especially if they do not release an answering scheme after the submission. –Term One survey*

*Sometimes the marks match the feedback, however there have been times when the feedback has been positive by my marks are still low. –Term Three survey*

*Feedback varies from marker to marker. Sometimes the feedback matches the marks I have gotten but sometimes I have received good feedback but he marks differ. It confuses me as I am not sure where I went wrong and how I can rectify it. –Term Three survey*

When it comes to opportunities around student voice, most student comments in both surveys indicated they had been provided with the chance to give feedback on their experience with the course. This was done through surveys, conversations with staff or through more formal meetings as a course rep in our Academic Representation system. While many of the comments did not elaborate further about their experience, there were some instances in both surveys where students maintained they had seen a positive change in the course from this feedback. There were, however, other instances where students discussed how there had been no change and they do not feel listened to or taken seriously by their department. There were also a handful of comments in both surveys where students mentioned they had not had an opportunity to provide feedback. During our Term One survey there were multiple comments from students who said our survey was the first time they had been allowed give their opinion about their course and student experience at Royal Holloway. Below is a selection of comments from both surveys which look at the postgraduate taught community's perception around student voice in their course.

*This is the first time I have been asked about the academic aspects of the course  
–Term One survey*

*[Department redacted] dept really want to improve things, but are just limited  
in what they can do. –Term One survey*

*I am a course representative so this is quite easy. –Term One survey*

*We were asked to complete the course feedback before we had the block mod  
course, and we couldn't access the feedback survey after the course. Feedback  
does not always feel listened to. –Term One survey*

*RHUL is good at this—termly surveys etc and the academics listen to what we  
have to say. –Term Three survey*

*I agree that we have been given the opportunity to provide feedback (via  
surveys) but I do not feel listened to as there was no follow up or changes  
throughout this year. Term Three survey*

The Students' Union hopes the composition of the recommendations at the end of the document helps the postgraduate taught community feel as though their voice has been heard and valued. We will continue to work alongside the University to ensure this community of students is given opportunities to provide feedback with an aim to create impactful and positive change.

#### C9. The Dissertation or Major Project

In our summer survey we asked both the September and January cohorts about their experiences with the final stage of their degree—the dissertation or major project. We included logic skips to separate students who were not in the process of writing their dissertation from completing questions about that area of the student experience. 92.86 per cent of September survey starters answered they had begun work on their dissertation, and all but one student had been assigned a supervisor. There was a mix of full-time and part-time students from this cohort. 93.33 per cent of January respondents answered they had begun work, and all but one student from that group had been assigned a supervisor. All of the January respondents were full-time students. It was concerning to learn that two of the students who were in the middle of working on their dissertation or final project had yet to be assigned a supervisor by July, especially as their dissertation deadline was approaching.

We asked students about their satisfaction with the support they received both from their department and their supervisors, and the tables below present the results separately for the September and January cohorts.

Student agreement question	% of September survey respondents (75 responses)				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
How much do you agree with the following statement?: 'My department has been preparing me for my dissertation or major project, and I understand the expected standards of the work.'	26.67	53.33	13.33	5.33	1.33
How much do you agree with the following statement? : 'I have been receiving support from my supervisor while working on my dissertation or major project.'	48	37.33	8	5.33	1.33

Table 82: September respondents' satisfaction with dissertation or major project support, summer survey

Student agreement question	% of January survey respondents (14 responses)				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
How much do you agree with the following statement?: 'My department has been preparing me for my dissertation or major project, and I understand the expected standards of the work.'	35.71	42.86	21.43	-	-
How much do you agree with the following statement? : 'I have been receiving support from my supervisor while working on my dissertation or major project.'	35.71	64.29	-	-	-

Table 83: September respondents' satisfaction with dissertation or major project support, summer survey

When we looked more closely at the responses for the September group, we learned that only 66.66 per cent of part-time students were satisfied to an extent with the support they received from the department compared to 81.16 per cent of full-time students. However, 100 per cent of part-time students were satisfied to an extent with the support they received from their supervisor compared to 84.05 per cent of full-time students. The results present the possibility that part-time students are perhaps forced to rely more on their supervisors during this process because their departments lack the proper support for this community of students. This report has highlighted the many ways part-time students feel overlooked compared to full-time students, and there is a possibility this is exaggerated further during this part of the degree.

September and January students who identified positive experiences with receiving support from their department discussed their general satisfaction from the preparation they received, students mentioned staff were helpful and students were

given access to previous dissertations to better prepare for their own project. Student comments which discussed high satisfaction with their supervisor stated they had received good support and provided regular feedback. There were also recurring comments that their supervisor communicated regularly and they had consistent meet ups online or in person to discuss the project. Below is a selection of positive comments for both satisfaction questions in the summer survey.

*We had an entire module on research methods, which was very useful to prepare us. Our lecturers have been mentioning our dissertation since about October so it's been something we've been aware of for a long time now.*

*The department organized a series of workshops to prepare us. However, it is true they were quite late in time.*

*My supervisor has been great! Always replied to emails, spends time with my work, always happy to chat. I feel confident in the dissertation.*

*My supervisor arrange meeting with me after every two weeks. These meetings helps me with my project and solve issues that i have regarding the topic.*

Students from both cohorts who discussed their negative experiences with receiving support from their department maintained they received no support, or they would have liked more detailed guidance about the dissertation or final project. There were also a handful of comments which highlighted the negative impact the UCU strikes had on their preparation for their dissertation or major project both from a department and supervision level. Students who explained their negative satisfaction rating about the help they received from their supervisor maintained it was because their supervisor was often busy and slow to respond to queries. There was also an instance where the student stated their supervisor was not fit for the role. Finally, some comments mentioned the student received support but they would have liked more guidance from their supervisor while working on the project. Below is a selection of negative comments for both satisfaction questions in the summer survey.

*Overall departmental preparation has been low, however preparation from certain individual staff has been better.*

*The expectations are clear, but I do not feel that we have been prepped sufficiently. We needed more extensive sessions on qualitative and quantitative research methods. The module on qualitative research was in term 3, but it should have been in term 2. Quantitative research should have also been its own module, instead we received a 1 hour workshop which was very generic and also came extremely late in the process.*

*The prep was purely perfunctory [sic]. There was no check ins to ensure that the project was strong*

*Definitely the supervisor supports you but there is no general support from the department except the handbook provided.*

*There has been little to no help - the feedback given has not been constructive.*

We asked students whether they had regular contact with their supervisors while working on their dissertation or major project and 85.33 per cent of September respondents answered yes compared to 78.57 per cent of January starters. Finally, we

asked students to rate their overall satisfaction with their supervisor in terms of contact hours, their knowledge about the topic, and the support and feedback they provided students while working on their dissertation or major project. The tables below present the results for September and January starters.

<b>How satisfied are you with your supervisor? (Think about the contact hours, their knowledge about the topic, and the support and feedback they have been giving you while working on your dissertation or major project).</b>					
<b>Cohort and response number</b>	<b>% of respondents (75 responses)</b>				
	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Very unsatisfied</b>
September (75)	46.67	42.66	5.33	2.67	2.67
January (14)	57.14	35.71	7.14	-	-

*Table 84: Per cent of respondents' overall satisfaction with supervisor, summer survey*

89.33 per cent of September respondents were satisfied to an extent and, within this group, 100 per cent of part-time students were satisfied to an extent compared to 88.40 per cent of full-time students. 92.85 per cent of January respondents were satisfied to an extent. Student comments mirrored what was previously said in the other questions of the survey, and many supervisors received praise for being knowledgeable about the topic and their support. Improved contact hours with dissertation or major project supervisors is one area which could be improved for students who answered they were 'unsatisfied' or 'very unsatisfied'.

#### C10. Careers, Employability and the Postgraduate Taught Degree

One comment which recurred throughout all three surveys and our Term Two focus group was that a proportion of postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway want more practical, real-life experience and careers support while undertaking the degree. This comment cropped up with both January and September starters in different themes for each of the surveys like teaching, skills development, overall satisfaction and degree expectations. Participants during our Term Two focus group asked the Students' Union to include questions about the University professional services, especially the Careers Service because that is one area of the student experience they wanted to be improved. We asked students in our Term Three survey how much they agreed with the following statement: 'I have been given the chance to develop the necessary skills which have better prepared me for my career'. The table below presents the results for both September and January starters.

How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been given the chance to develop the necessary skills which have better prepared me for my career'.					
Cohort and response number	% of survey respondents				
	Definitely Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Definitely Disagree
September (79)	20.25	34.18	34.18	8.86	2.53
January (11)	18.18	63.64	-	9.09	9.09

Table 85: Per cent of respondents' agreement with career skills development, Term Three survey

54.43 per cent of September starters agree to an extent that they have been given the chance to develop the necessary skills which have better prepared them for their career. This is much lower than the 82.18 per cent of January starters who agree to an extent with this statement. While January students had a higher agreement than September students, the table reveals that a much higher proportion of January students disagree with this statement. Further breakdowns by study status revealed that only 33.33 per cent of part-time students from the September cohort agreed to an extent with this statement compared to 57.14 per cent of full-time students.

30 students from the September group chose to elaborate on their agreement rating in the free-text response attached to this question. Just under half of the comments described students' general satisfaction with the support they have received and the skills they have gained, although there were repeated requests for further support in this area and many students stated they would like more practical materials or opportunities while undertaking the degree. Some students admitted they were unsure what they wanted to do for work after graduation or they were unaware of what jobs were available because there was no discussion about possible opportunities after graduation. Finally, there were repeated instances in the survey where students stated they did not learn anything new, and the material was too generic for them to improve. This sentiment was repeated by one of the students who attended our Term Two focus group who expressed their disappointment with the programme. They maintained their experience did not live up to their expectation because they thought the programme would be 'intensive' and provide them with 'real-life experience'. They maintained they 'have gained no new knowledge about what is going to happen in the future' and they were now focused on 'making connections' on their own after graduation. Below is a selection of student responses from the Term Three survey which present students varying experiences in this area of the degree.

*This course was quite different what I expected before I joined. But I found it very helpful to develop the idea for my future career.*

*The material is significantly helping me in my current position.*

*I am already in employment and have the right skills. This course gave me academic knowledge, which I feel is a bit different.*

*I have not learnt anything significant or unique through the course. We had NO practical lessons or training experiences. We also did not have much support to*

*find placement opportunities which was the whole reason I picked the course in the first place.*

*It may be due to the fact that I don't know what I want to do after university. But I Have found this very difficult to decide what I want to do after uni due to the lack of career options or discussions.*

Many students who had similar negative experiences with the practical elements of their course reiterated their feelings in different sections of the survey like teaching, overall satisfaction, and degree expectations, which highlights this was one area of the postgraduate taught student experience which needs further work. Departments should conduct audits of their courses for postgraduate taught students and create a supporting document which outlines learned skills students should expect to gain while undertaking the course. This document should be shared with students at the start of each course to manage expectations and for accountability. Additionally, departments and schools should review their budgets and consider running smaller, coordinated careers events for postgraduate taught students throughout the academic year to gain more knowledge about potential job opportunities after completing the degree.

The Students' Union wanted to learn more about postgraduate taught students' engagement with the University's professional service teams, especially the Careers Service, and we asked students in both the Term One and Term Three surveys to select which teams they had engaged with since starting the course. The table below presents the results for September starters in our Term One survey.

<b>Have you accessed any of the following University or Students' Union services (please select all that apply) (116 respondents)</b>	
<b>Venue</b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
Student Services	51.72
Careers Service	33.62
CEDAS	32.76
None of the above	22.41
Wellbeing Services	12.93
SU Advice Centre	8.62
DDS	6.03
I don't know any of these services	1.72

*Table 86: Per cent of respondents' who have accessed University and Students' Union service teams, Term Three survey*

In Term One only 33.62 per cent of respondents answered they had engaged with the Careers Service, of which all but one student was studying full-time. The table below presents the results for both the September and January cohorts in our Term Three survey which shows a small increase in engagement from September respondents.

Have you accessed any of the following University or Students' Union services (please select all that apply)		
Service	% of September respondents (79 responses)	% of January respondents (10 responses)
Student Services	45.57	50
Careers Services	37.97	60
CEDAS	37.97	30
Wellbeing Services	34.18	20
None of the Above	27.85	10
SU Advice Centre	16.56	20
DNS	7.59	-

Table 87: Per cent of respondents' who have accessed University and Students' Union service teams, Term Three survey

We additionally asked students to rate their satisfaction with the University's professional service teams and the table below presents the results for both the September and January cohorts.

How satisfied are you with your experience of using these services?					
Cohort and response number	% of survey respondents (57 responses)				
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
September (57)	31.58	47.37	19.30	1.75	-
January (9)	44.44	33.33	11.11	-	11.11

Table 88: Per cent of respondents' satisfaction with University professional service teams, Term Three survey

Less than half of the September cohort answered they had engaged with the Careers Service since starting their degree, however, 73 per cent of those respondents answered they were satisfied to an extent with their experience using the Careers Service. 66.67 per cent of January respondents were satisfied to an extent. Unfortunately, only two students from the September cohort used the comment section to explain their rating about the Careers Service which are presented below.

*Careers services has good appointment availability and LinkedIn days which really help.*

*I did not find career services very helpful in terms of helping me search for a job in my field or any advice on how to secure one.*

While not many students discussed their experiences with the Careers Services in this section of the survey, there were recurring comments throughout all our surveys and

during the focus group from postgraduate taught students who want more support in this area of the degree.

We asked September and January students whether they had plans after completing the degree and 81.33 per cent of September respondents and 91.67 per cent of January respondents answered yes. Within the September cohort we examined the response numbers by study status and 79.71 per cent of full-time students knew what they wanted to do compared to 100 per cent of part-time students. There was a free text response option, and 48 September students and six January students discussed their plans after graduation. A breakdown of responses is shared below from the September cohort:

- 62.50 per cent of the comments stated they wanted to get a job or are in the currently applying for jobs.
- 18.75 per cent of students explained they already had a job lined up after graduation.
- 10.42 per cent mentioned the possibility of further study, of which two comments specifically mentioned a PhD and third one discussed a PGCE.
- 4.17 per cent of comments said they would do temp work.
- 2.08 per cent of comments came from students already employed.
- 2.08 per cent of comments indicated they would change career.

From the January cohort, 66.67 per cent of comments mentioned they had plans to look for a job, and two students indicated they would like to stay in the UK. One student discussed their plans to start their own business and, finally, one student mentioned they will focus on their career. There is more work the University can do to support postgraduate taught students with improving their employability and help them prepare for a career after graduation. This is familiar territory as postgraduate research students also had lower engagement and satisfaction with the Careers Service when we ran our Policy Inquiry during the 2019-20 academic year. The Careers Service has been identified by postgraduates for being too undergraduate-centric which does not provide enough tailored support to postgraduate students at Royal Holloway. Comments like these recur regularly in our all-student survey Rate Your Union every year and were consistent in student responses when we ran a Policy Inquiry which examined Royal Holloway students' experiences with the Careers Service in 2019. As a result, the University Careers Service and departments should review their current provision of support and funding for postgraduate taught students and highlight gaps in their services for this community. Additionally, the University Careers Service should implement a separate Careers Fair for postgraduate taught and research students. This event should incorporate further study information for postgraduate taught students as well as career opportunities for both academic and non-academic routes. The Careers Service should hold this event at least once at both the Egham and London locations each academic year.

### C11. Community

Unlike postgraduate research students and undergraduates who study for three or more years, many postgraduate taught students are in the unique position of having usually only one year of full-time study to complete their degree and foster a sense of belonging with their department and other students undertaking a Masters. Students who have remained at Royal Holloway after their undergraduate degree will have the

advantage of knowing the institution and department, as well as a possible connection with the Students' Union through our student groups or representative roles. Students who have joined Royal Holloway for the first time while embarking on the degree will have less of a connection to many elements of the University, and many may wonder where they fit in for such a short period of time, especially when so much of Royal Holloway is focused on the undergraduate student experience. Students from other underrepresented groups like commuters, international and mature students may find there are additional barriers preventing them from forming a strong connection with other students and staff at Royal Holloway, and this can have a real negative impact on their experience while studying.

In our Term One and Term Three surveys we asked students two questions specifically around their experience with belonging and engagement as postgraduate taught students. We first asked students how much they agreed with the following statement, 'I feel like I am a part of my academic community within my department'. Below are the results for the September cohort in our Term One and Three surveys as well as the January results in our Term Three survey.

<b>How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel like I am a part of an academic community within my department.'</b>					
<b>Cohort, Term and response number</b>	<b>% of survey respondents</b>				
	<b>Definitely Agree</b>	<b>Mostly Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mostly Disagree</b>	<b>Definitely Disagree</b>
September, Term One (116)	34.48	37.07	18.97	6.03	3.45
September, Term Three (81)	18.52	33.33	23.46	19.75	4.94
January, Term Three (12)	33.33	33.33	16.67	8.33	8.33

*Table 89: Per cent of respondents' agreement around academic community, Term One and Three surveys*

71.55 per cent of September students agreed to an extent that they felt part of an academic community near the end of Term One. We did further breakdowns to see whether agreement was more weighted with certain communities within the postgraduate taught cohort, and it was very clear this feeling was not evenly spread across the group. Full-time September students had a total of 74.53 per cent agreement compared to 40 per cent of part-time students. 61.11 per cent of Home students from the September group agreed to an extent with this statement compared to 80 per cent of EU students and 76 per cent of international students.

When we asked students to explain their agreement rating, most comments highlighted that they feel connected to their peers within their department. Students who had positive experiences also maintained they felt the postgraduate taught community was supportive and inclusive, and most of this was through student-led initiatives and events. There were also recurring instances in the student comments which revealed there are students in this community who had no interaction with other students, and they feel more social events would help them feel more involved within their department and the community. Below is a selection of responses from our Term One

survey which present students positive and negative experiences of belonging in their department and as a postgraduate taught student.

*Being put on the London campus effectively removes us from the department.*

*We are all studying a really intensive course and have a nice supportive community helping each other out.*

*Being the academic student rep, I feel more involved with the academic community.*

*I do agree with it because I can feel the vibe of academic community by surrounding with people from different background and discuss about business and relevant topics.*

*Whilst my course mates and I have created a community, this does not extend to the department as a whole.*

*I have seen nothing done that isn't student led.*

*Even though the department is doing their best, the coord is not engaging.*

In our Term Three survey 51.85 per cent of September respondents agreed to an extent that they felt part of an academic community which is a decrease of nearly a 20 percentage points from Term One. This decrease was seen across both full- and part-time students, with full-time students seeing a drop of nearly 19 percentage points and part-time students experiencing a decrease of nearly 18 percentage points. This decrease occurred across students based on their fee status, however, EU and international students saw the largest decrease of 50 and 20 percentage points respectively. 66.66 per cent of January starters agreed to an extent with this statement and they were all full-time, international students.

There were 35 student responses which elaborated on their experience, and just under half presented students' strong sense of belonging within their department. These comments discussed the ways students felt included within their department because of its size, organised activities and events, and opportunities to engage with other students. There were more instances in this survey, however, which highlighted students lack of belonging. Reasons students gave were that they had too much work to socialise, there were no events, students felt a part of the course but not the department, the small size of the course meant there was no sense of community and, finally, students based in London felt excluded. Below is a selection of responses which present students' feelings around whether they were part of an academic community while studying in our Term Three survey

*As a London based student we really do not feel part of RHUL, it's sad.*

*I feel close to some of those on my course but not the department.*

*Being CPD mode, it is difficult to feel part of the department, though I am very impressed with my interactions with the department leads.*

*I'm part of my community within my degree, but there is little connection to other courses.*

*There is no community to begin with. Most masters student are always by themselves. There are not as many events or community based activities for masters students and since it's only a year's course nobody interacts with one another and not exactly encouraged to do so.*

*My dept is so small that it's really hard to feel connected with the other students - I feel more a part of the history community than classics*

*I feel like there could have been more activities offered by the University to build a stronger academic community*

*This has been the best thing about the MA programme! I love being part of this community. I feel like there is such a step up from undergrad and it's nice to have this group of academics.*

*We are a very small group on my course but we all know each other and get on very well with each other and the wider department it feels like there definitely is a community.*

We additionally asked students about engagement opportunities with other students and to rate their agreement with the following question: 'I have been given sufficient opportunities to engage with other students on the course (face to face and/or online).' (This could be to discuss the course, collaborative work or at informal social events)'. Below are the survey results for September starters in our Term One and both September and January students in our Term Three survey,

How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I have been given sufficient opportunities to engage with other students on the course (face to face and/or online).' (This could be to discuss the course, collaborative work or at informal social events)'					
Cohort, Survey Term and response number	% of survey respondents				
	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree
September, Term One (116)	41.38	37.93	12.93	6.90	0.86
September, Term Three (81)	33.33	39.51	12.35	9.88	4.94
January, Term Three (11)	16.67	50	8.33	8.33	16.67

Table 90: Per cent of respondents' agreement around engagement, Term One and Three surveys

79.31 per cent of September respondents agreed to an extent that they had had opportunities to engage with other students. We looked closer at fee and study status to see how agreement sat with different communities within the postgraduate taught cohort, and we learned that 82.08 per cent of full-time students felt they had been given opportunities to engage with other students compared to 50 per cent of part-time students. In terms of fee status, we learned that 77.78 per cent of Home students, 80 per cent of EU students and 80 per cent of international students from the September cohort agreed to an extent about engagement opportunities.

We asked students to elaborate on their agreement in a free text response. There were often positive occurrences in the student comments when it came to discussions about classroom engagement and group work, however, the most repeated request from

students on ways to improve their engagement with other students was for more social events to be held within their department. There were a handful of negative instances in the comments where students based at the London Campus, were commuter students or studying part-time highlighted they felt isolated or found it difficult to socialise with other postgraduate taught students. Below is a selection of comments from the September group in our Term One survey.

*I have participated in the social events and welcome dinner event which helped me to network with my fellow students.*

*Group meetings with staff, discussion boards, mixer activity in induction lecture, various social events on campus.*

*Appropriate levels of group working and independent working, and in-class discussion.*

*As a distant student living in London it is difficult to socialise on days I am not in University in person, most events I have seen have been in person.*

*At the London Campus, we do not have the required infrastructure to meet up with peers and work together or socialize.*

*The department have not run any informal social events that I am aware of. Collaborative work will be more prominent next term in terms of assessment.*

*We haven't had any informal events outside of lectures, more of these would be appreciated.*

*The engagement with other students has been student driven. There seems to be no way of meeting students on other pathways on my course.*

*I don't know that many other students, only those that are also PT in my year.*

In Term Three 72.84 per cent of September respondents agreed to an extent with this statement, which was a drop of 6.47 percentage points from Term One. Agreement went up for part-time students slightly more than five percentage points while full-time students dropped by 7 percentage points. International students for September starters saw a drop of 11 percentage, Home student agreement dropped by slightly more than 3 percentage points, and EU students had 100 per cent agreement which was an increase of 20 percentage points. Finally, 66.67 per cent of January respondents agreed to an extent with this statement.

Most comments in the free-text response section to this question in our Term Three survey presented students positive experiences with engagement because of opportunities to collaborate during class and group assignments, they met up with each other outside of teaching and they were able to attend events. Students who did not feel engaged stated it was because there were no opportunities to collaborate with other students because of fears around academic integrity and cheating, students did not attend class, students felt like there was no campus community, and they were excluded because they were based at the London Campus or because they were a mature student. Below is a selection of comments showing students various experiences around engagement with students in their department from our Term Three survey.

*[I]’ve engaged with my course mates loads especially since we are a small cohort.*

*As mentioned earlier, there are almost no opportunities available. There is a constant fear of having any course related discussions with any classmates as everything is considered an Academic Integrity issue.*

*In person teaching has encouraged this and allowed me to meet those on the course, we are a small course so all work really closely.*

*I engage with friends I made from the course outside of class time, but most students I have not had the chance to talk to because as stated in the previous question there is not much of a community or campus-feel outside of the scheduled lecture times.*

*I never had the opportunity to collaborate or share ideas. We were advised to work independently.*

*Collaborative work is an important part of the course, which I appreciate. We have had occasional opportunities for informal events, but I would have appreciated more - especially opportunities to discuss the course. Providing end of term feedback is useful, but not quite enough.*

*There was no collab work outside of class this year. This isn't the fault of the teaching. We were encouraged to do this, but sadly the other members of class would not take the class seriously, and often acted in a way that was exclusionary, and ageist.*

Reviewing the qualitative and quantitative data about postgraduate taught students’ feelings around engagement and community at Royal Holloway, departments and Schools should run more regular social events throughout the academic year for postgraduate taught students, and each School and department should review their annual budget and reserve funding for these social events. These events should be a mixture of daytime and evening activities to allow more opportunities for commuter, part-time and mature students to participate. One such event could be a Buddy Scheme for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction periods. This Buddy Scheme could introduce current postgraduate taught students to each other and suggest events they could attend together during our Freshers Festival and the University’s Welcome Week based upon their shared interests. Another opportunity to increase opportunities for engagement within this community could be created if departments and Schools reviewed their annual budgets and reserved funding for students to run their own regular events throughout the academic year. There were recurring comments in our surveys which highlighted one way students were able to form connections was through student-led events, and more opportunities for these events should be created if students are interested in running them. Finally, the University, Schools, departments and the Students’ Union should consider ways they can better engage with postgraduate taught students who are primarily based at the London Campus in Bloomsbury. Both the University and Students’ Union should review their current funding allocation to run more regular events throughout the academic year at the London Campus.

#### C12. The Students’ Union and Postgraduate Taught Students

The length and structure of our Policy Inquiry allowed the Students' Union to gain insight into what postgraduate taught students expected from us while studying at Royal Holloway, and whether their needs changed as the academic year progressed. Like with our postgraduate research Policy Inquiry, we knew our provision could be improved, and this project was an exciting opportunity to find out ways to better represent postgraduate taught students. Our surveys and focus group were also opportunities to learn more about what our current engagement with postgraduate taught student looks like so that we could make necessary improvements to provide better services and activities for this community while studying at Royal Holloway.

We used our Term One survey to learn more about what postgraduate taught students know about the Students' Union, and whether they have visited any of our venues. We asked September students, 'Do you know about the Students' Union and/or its services? (e.g. the Advice Centre, Student Groups, Academic Reps, SU Events, Collectives)', and 86.36 per cent of respondents answered they did. 50 per cent of respondents additionally answered that they knew who their postgraduate course rep was, and 69.09 per cent of those respondents answered they had engaged with their course rep. The tables below present the department breakdown for both questions. A blue highlight denotes 75 per cent of students or more in a department who answered yes, and a red highlight denotes 35 per cent of students or less in a department who answered no for these questions.

Do you know who your postgraduate course rep is? (110 responses)					
Department	% of respondents		Department	% of respondents	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Business and Management	48	52	History	63.64	36.36
Classics	100	-	Information Security	50	50
Computer Science	25	75	Law	100	-
Earth Sciences	-	100	Media Arts	100	-
Economics	33.33	66.67	Music	60	40
Electronic Engineering	100	-	Physics	100	-
English	20	80	PIR	20	80
Geography	66.67	33.33	Psychology	21.43	78.57
Health Studies	100	-			

Table 91: Per cent of respondents who know who their course rep is, Term One survey

Have you ever engaged with your postgraduate course rep? (55 responses)					
Department	% of respondents		Department	% of respondents	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Business and Management	75	25	History	85.71	14.29
Classics	100	-	Information Security	57.14	42.86
Computer Science	-	100	Law	66.67	33.33
Earth Sciences	-	-	Media Arts	66.67	33.33
Economics	100	-	Music	100	-
Electronic Engineering	50	50	Physics	-	100
English	100	-	PIR	-	100
Geography	50	50	Psychology	33.33	66.67
Health Studies	100	-			

Table 92: Per cent of respondents who engaged with their postgraduate course rep, Term One survey

The tables above reveal there is more work that could be done in this area to improve awareness about the Students' Union's Academic Representation system for postgraduate taught students. One way this could be achieved if the Students' Union sends a targeted email to postgraduate taught students which reminds them about of the ways they can engage with their School Rep as well as course reps to ensure they understand there is another avenue to submit feedback to their department about their experience at Royal Holloway. This email could also include information about how to find postgraduate course reps for their course or department on the Students' Union website.

We additionally asked students in our Term One survey to select all the SU venues they have visited since starting their course, and the table below presents the results.

Which SU Venues have you visited? (Please select all that apply) (110) responses	
Venue	% of respondents
The Shop	59.09
The Packhorse	50
Tommy's Kitchen	48.18
Medicine	45.45
SU Nightclub (Wednesday and Friday)	24.55
None of the above	20.91

*Table 93: Per cent of respondents and SU venues they have attended in Term One, Term One survey*

The table reveals that postgraduate taught students prefer to attend our smaller venues like the Packhorse, Tommy's Kitchen and Medicine rather than our main SU Venue nightclub which hosts club nights on Wednesday and Friday nights. This aligns with what postgraduate research students told us a few years ago, and it appears postgraduate taught students additionally do not want entertainment nights in the same vein as undergraduates.

This was confirmed in our Term Two focus group when we asked students whether they attended any Students' Union late-night events at one of our venues. One student answered they cannot keep up with undergraduate Freshers anymore, but they would perhaps like to have a SU club night for postgraduate students. Another student maintained they made friendships from halls, clubs and societies during their undergraduate degree, and they did not enjoy going to the Students' Union for events. Both of these students were Home students who had previously attended Royal Holloway during their undergraduate degree. One international student answered they had attended our Freshers Festival and had a good time, although they pointed out that international students who begin their degree in January do not receive the same experience when they arrive at Royal Holloway as September starters. Two of the students in our January focus groups stated they would like to attend our upcoming Summer Ball. While a large proportion of postgraduate taught students might not attend our larger, undergraduate-centric events, there is still interest among the cohort, especially from international students who would like to build more social connections after moving country to undertake the degree.

We took the information we gathered from the Policy Inquiry and created smaller events for communities at Royal Holloway with an aim to increase belonging and reduce loneliness for students at Royal Holloway during our Freshers Festival in 2023. For postgraduate taught students we ran a daytime event, 'PGT and Bubble Tea', and postgraduate researchers had an evening event called 'Wine, Dine, Thesis Time'. We additionally ran events for our course reps and those interested in academic communities as well as commuter students. We have continued to run more postgraduate focused events throughout the academic year like our meet and mingle events. These have been met with mixed success, and the Students' Union should continue to host a greater number of events specifically for postgraduate taught

students. Set events should occur each year for postgraduate taught student like PGT and Bubble Tea during the separate September and January induction periods at both the London and Egham locations. Events should be a mixture of daytime and evening activities to allow more opportunities for commuter, part-time and mature students to participate in the events. The Students' Union and the University should additionally consider a joint approach to hosting more postgraduate taught events.

We used our Term Three survey to learn more about postgraduate taught student participation in Student Groups and whether they had accessed our support service, The Advice Centre. The table below shows the proportion of September and January respondents who accessed the Advice Centre in our Term Three survey.

<b>Have you accessed any of the following University or Students' Union services (please select all that apply)</b>		
<b>Service</b>	<b>% of September respondents (79 responses)</b>	<b>% of January respondents (10 responses)</b>
SU Advice Centre	16.56	20

*Table 94: Per cent of respondents who accessed the SU Advice Centre, Term Three survey*

Student satisfaction was mixed for January respondents with one student answering they were 'satisfied' with their experience of using this service and another student answered 'very unsatisfied'. In contrast, 92.31 per cent of September respondents were satisfied to an extent. There were two student comments in our Term Three survey which discussed their experience with the Advice Centre, and they have been shared below.

*I had approved the SU Advice Centre for an academic integrity Issue, the advisor did not bother showing up for the meeting.*

*I felt like the SU advice and Well-being services were more supportive than the teaching staff.*

During the 2022-23 academic year, 3.97 per cent of postgraduate taught students had a membership in a society, 3.87 per cent in a sports club and 1.79 per cent in a media outlet. We asked September and January students whether they were a member of any Students' Union student group and the table below presents the results.

<b>Are you a member of an SU student group? (e.g. a society, sports club, or media outlet)? Please check all that apply.</b>		
<b>Service</b>	<b>Overall % of September respondents (79 responses)</b>	<b>Overall % of January respondents (10 responses)</b>
None of the above	68.35	80
Society	25.32	20
Sports Club	10.13	-
Media Outlet	-	-

*Table 95: Per cent of respondents participation in an SU Student group, Term Three survey*

We did further breakdowns by study status to see if there was a difference between full-time student participation compared to part-time participation, and 95 per cent of respondents who answered they were a member of a society were full-time students. For sports clubs, 87.50 per cent of respondents were full-time students. There is also a clear difference in participation levels between the September and January groups which is likely a result of their different start dates and missed opportunities to attend our Freshers Festival in Term One which devotes one day to promoting our diverse range of student groups at the Students' Union. Consequently, the Students' Union should consider sending a targeted email to all January students during their induction period which provides detailed information about the activities, events and services we offer at the Students' Union. This information should also include information about our Sabbatical Officers, voluntary student leaders like course reps and community officers, student groups and services we offer at the Advice Centre.

We knew postgraduate taught participation would be lower than undergraduates, and we asked survey respondents who answered 'none of the above' to explain why they did not participate in a student group. We received 26 free text responses from September students, and the top three themes mentioned in the comments were location, time and other responsibilities. Students who brought up the issue of location mentioned that all student groups are located in Egham which is a problem for commuter students who live far away from that campus or are based at the London Campus in Bloomsbury. The second most repeated issue was a lack of time. Students mentioned they did not have enough time to participate in student groups due to their workload and commuting restrictions. Finally, students who referenced they had other responsibilities mentioned they could not participate due to their jobs or family responsibilities. A few other recurring issues mentioned in the comments were a lack of interest, financial difficulties, timetable clashes with teaching and, finally, students did not want to commit to a student group when they were only studying for one year. Below are a selection of student comments which discuss their reasons for not participating in a student group in our Term Three survey.

*I did not participate as I am only here for a year. I have a part time job that I do along with my studies and I did not have enough time.*

*I was commuting into uni and working to cover tuition, so I felt like I was unable to find time or the money to commute to take part in groups. The entrance fee into these student groups is also really off-putting.*

*As a master's student and with the course only being a year, it was hard to find a society that I liked. But I also did not have time between Uni and my part-time job.*

*I have my hands full in getting used to UK teaching and culture.*

*My studies are all in the central London campus, so it's difficult to go to Egham just to attend an event for a few hours.*

In addition to student groups, we asked Term Three survey respondents about their volunteering experience at Royal Holloway or elsewhere. 3.80 per cent of September starters answered they undertook volunteering Royal Holloway and 21.52 per cent volunteered elsewhere. No January respondents participated in volunteering. Following

this question, we asked students about their agreement with the following statement: 'I feel as though the student group and volunteering experience has improved my PGT experience as a whole at Royal Holloway'. The results for the September and January groups are presented in the table below.

How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel as though the student group and volunteering experience has improved my PGT experience as a whole at Royal Holloway.'						
Cohort and response number	% of survey respondents					
	Definitely Agree	Mostly Agree	Neutral	Mostly Disagree	Definitely Disagree	N/A
September (79)	6.33	16.46	18.99	3.80	22.53	51.90
January (10)	-	20	10	-	10	60

Table 96: Per cent of respondents' agreement about positive impact of student groups and volunteering, Term Three survey

Most of the responses to this question fell into the not applicable category due to lack of participation in these areas of the student experience while undertaking the postgraduate taught degree. We included a free-text response option to this question, and 12 September students explained their agreement rating in more detail. Recurring themes mirrored what has already been stated earlier about workload for the course, timetable clashes with classes and a lack of opportunities for London-based students. Positive instances in the comments highlighted the ways their participation helped them engage with other students outside the classroom and form connections. Below are a selection of student responses to this question.

*I am much older than most students and there is nothing offered which would suit me.*

*It helped in engaging with other students.*

*PGT timetabling did not allow me to be a part of a team I have loved for 4 years, thus ruining my relationship with the sport and some of my teammates.*

*Without my sport group, the only people I would have been introduced to would have been the 5 people in my classes.*

*I didn't participate because there isn't any support for PGT students in joining these groups when not based in Egham.*

As a result of student responses and comments for these three questions, the Students' Union should review the current level of participation among postgraduate taught students in our student groups and further encourage postgraduate taught students to become more involved and have access to another opportunity for fostering a sense of belonging and forming connections outside the classroom. Ways we could further promote student groups is through targeted communications about our Student Group Access Fund, which offers students £150 each academic year and can cover a variety of costs like membership fees, kit and travel costs, competition entry costs as well as some other non-essential costs within the membership group. This could be particularly beneficial to postgraduate taught students who do not receive a maintenance fund

while studying. The University, Schools and departments could additionally review the timetable structure for postgraduate taught students and see whether this community could benefit from the Wednesday afternoons off in a similar vein to undergraduate students. This would allow them a chance to participate in sports club events. There were instances in the survey where students mentioned they were unable to compete in sports club sports fixtures because their timetable scheduled classes for Wednesday afternoons.

If postgraduate taught students, however, really are disinterested in joining one of our student groups, the Students' Union needs to think of better and more effective ways of engaging with this community. One way this could be done is through more regular outreach on postgraduate taught issues and improved support for postgraduate taught students through campaigns run by student leaders, regular blogs and social media posts about issues impacting postgraduate taught students across the higher education sector and, finally, through more events coordinated with our Postgraduate Taught Community Officer.

### C13. Overall satisfaction

One question we asked all postgraduate taught students in our three surveys was, 'How satisfied are you with the overall experience of your course'. This section will present the results for September students in our Term One, Term Three and summer surveys, and our Term Three and summer surveys for the January group.

<b>How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel like I am a part of an academic community within my department.'</b>					
<b>Cohort, Term and response number</b>	<b>% of survey respondents</b>				
	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Very unsatisfied</b>
September, Term One (110)	32.73	43.64	17.27	5.45	0.91
September, Term Three (79)	32.91	41.77	16.46	6.33	2.53
September, summer survey (81)	20.99	54.32	9.88	11.11	3.70

*Table 97: September student satisfaction with their overall experience, Term One, Three and summer surveys*

Overall satisfaction did not take a significant drop between for September students in our first two survey despite the UCU strikes, and 76.37 per cent of students answered they were satisfied to an extent in Term One compared to 74.68 per cent of students in Term Three. When we looked at different demographics, however, we noticed that international students had the largest dip in overall satisfaction with their experience between Term One and Term Three. In November, 80.28 per cent of international students answered they were satisfied to an extent compared to 68.29 per cent in April, which was a drop of 11.99 percentage points.

Study status did not see a major change in satisfaction between our Term One and Three surveys, although full-time students had higher satisfaction in both surveys compared to part-time students. In our summer survey, overall satisfaction rose for

September starters by 0.63 percentage points with a satisfaction rating of 75.31 per cent. Unlike the previous survey, there was a clear change in satisfaction by study status with positive movement for part-time students. In Term Three, 66.67 per cent of part-time students were satisfied to an extent with their overall experience, and in our summer survey 85.71 per cent of part-time students answered they were satisfied. This was a rise of nearly 20 percentage points for this group within the postgraduate taught community. Full-time students in comparison only saw a small rise from 74.34 per cent to 75.72 per cent combined satisfaction with their overall experience. Finally, while international students had the lowest satisfaction rating in our Term Three survey, they had the highest combined satisfaction at 77.77 per cent in our summer survey. Home students had a 7.35 per cent drop in satisfaction with a combined total at 75 per cent for this group, and EU students had the lowest total for this survey at 60 per cent—a drop in 15 percentage points from the Term Three survey. The table below presents the results for the January group.

<b>How much do you agree with the following statement? 'I feel like I am a part of an academic community within my department.'</b>					
<b>Cohort, Term and response number</b>	<b>% of survey respondents</b>				
	<b>Very satisfied</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Unsatisfied</b>	<b>Very unsatisfied</b>
January, Term Three (10)	40	40	-	10	10
January, summer survey (12)	30.77	30.77	23.08	15.38	-

*Table 98: January student satisfaction with their overall experience, Term Three and summer surveys*

80 per cent of January respondents were satisfied to an extent in our Term Three survey, and there was a drop of 18.46 percentage points in our summer survey with 61.54 per cent combined satisfaction rating for this cohort. In contrast to September students who saw an increase in 'neutral', 'unsatisfied' and 'very unsatisfied' responses, January students had a larger shift towards neutral satisfaction with an increase of 23.08 percentage points. There were free text-responses attached to this question in all three surveys, however, this paper has already discussed many of the recurring themes and issues raised by students in this section of the survey and no further discussion will occur. It is our hope that the composed list of recommendations for the University and Students' Union will provide better support and improve the overall postgraduate taught at Royal Holloway once implemented.

#### C14. Next steps

The work that has gone into this report has spanned nearly two academic years, and we are confident that we have undertaken insightful research into the postgraduate taught student experience and Royal Holloway. The recommendations at the end of the document have been shared with the University and senior management at the Students' Union, and we believe, once implemented, they have the potential to create long-lasting and positive change for current and prospective postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway.

## Recommendations

### 1. The Postgraduate Taught Community

There is a strong consensus among postgraduate taught students that there is a real need for Schools, departments, the University and the Students' Union to run more regular events throughout the academic year and increase engagement with postgraduate taught students to help foster a stronger sense of community within this cohort while studying at Royal Holloway.

- 1.1 Schools and departments should run more regular social events throughout the academic year for postgraduate taught students. These events should be a mixture of daytime and evening activities to allow more opportunities for commuter, part-time and mature students to participate. Events could include guest lectures, informal reading groups, tea and coffee mornings or could encompass an entire day in the vein of a student-run conference. Following implementation, academic communicators could additionally run a coordinated events schedule alongside departments.
- 1.2 Departments and Schools should review their annual budgets and reserve funding for students to run their own regular events throughout the academic year. The English department at King's College London, for example, has a postgraduate student-run seminar series, 'The Abstract', where postgraduate taught and research students meet fortnightly and present papers or discuss their work in a more informal environment outside the classroom. The convenors of The Abstract are also responsible for running their annual postgraduate student conference each year, which brings together staff, postgraduate taught and research students together for a day to listen to papers presented by postgraduate students in that department. Departments could consider allocating these funds to the academic community assigned to each department following implementation.
- 1.3 The Students' Union should host a greater number of events specifically for postgraduate taught students throughout the academic year. Set events should occur each year for postgraduate taught student meet and mingle days during the separate September and January induction periods at both the London and Egham locations, and all other events can be adjusted depending on the schedule that academic year. Events should be a mixture of daytime and evening activities to allow more opportunities for commuter, part-time and mature students to participate in the events, and the Students' Union should liaise with the Postgraduate Taught Community Officer when planning these events.
- 1.4 The University, Schools, departments and the Students' Union should consider ways they can better engage with students who are primarily based at the London Campus in Bloomsbury. Both the University and Students' Union should review their current funding allocation to run more regular events throughout the academic year at the London Campus, while additionally considering ways they can further connect those students with members of the postgraduate taught community on the Egham Campus if they reside outside of London.

- 1.5 The Students' Union should increase outreach on postgraduate taught issues and continue to offer support for postgraduate taught students. This could be done through campaigns run by student leaders, regular blogs and social media posts, the Advice Centre and our Postgraduate Taught Community Officer.
- 1.6 The Students' Union should send a termly targeted email out to postgraduate taught students which reminds them of ways they can engage with their School Rep and postgraduate course rep to ensure they understand this is another avenue to submit feedback to their departments about their experience at Royal Holloway. Information should also include how postgraduate taught students can find their Course Rep on the Students' Union website.
- 1.7 The Students' Union should review the current level of participation among postgraduate taught students in our student groups, and further encourage postgraduate taught students to become more involved in our student groups. This recommendation aligns with recommendation 4.4 below.
- 1.8 The Students' Union consider running a Buddy Scheme for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction periods. This buddy scheme would introduce current postgraduate taught students to each other and suggest events they could attend together based upon their shared interests during the induction period.
- 1.9 The University should consider creating a Postgraduate Taught Student Hub on the main University website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App. This could be set up in a similar vein to the Doctoral School website where postgraduate taught students could find all relevant information about their course in a single place. A single webpage could streamline important information for September and January starters.

## 2. Inductions

There are issues with the current provision of inductions for both September and January starters.

- 2.1 The University, Schools and departments should review its induction process for September and January starters, ensuring that the time and date of events are easily accessible and correct on the Royal Holloway main website, Student Intranet and Royal Holloway App. There were recurring comments that stated events were shared last minute or times did not match what was on the website.
- 2.2 The University, Schools and departments should review the induction material for postgraduate taught students during the September and January induction period. There were recurring comments in our Term One survey which highlighted the material was repetitive to those who attended Royal Holloway during their undergraduate degree, there were assumptions in knowledge about the way the University runs which negatively impacted students who did their

undergraduate degree elsewhere and there were also comments which stated the information was not targeted towards postgraduate students.

2.3 The University, Schools and departments should consider including an induction talk on Financial Advice for postgraduate taught students during both the September and January induction periods. One of the main reasons listed by students who considered pausing or leaving their studies was that they were unable to work and undertake the degree at the same time. This was a recurring theme for both full-time and part-time students, although dissatisfaction in this area was highest for full-time students.

2.4 The University, Schools, departments and the Students' Union should consider ways of improving engagement with postgraduate taught students who are situated at the London Campus during the September and January induction periods.

2.5 The University, Schools and departments should review the induction process for January starters, and whether these postgraduate taught students are receiving the same information, support and guidance during their induction period as September starters. The percentage of January starters who attended induction sessions upon arrival was much lower than September starters. The most noticeable difference was with CEDAS.

2.6 The Students' Union should consider sending a targeted email to all January starters during their induction period which provides detailed information about the Students' Union, our Sabbatical Officers and student leaders, our services like the Advice Centre and food outlets and information about upcoming events. The Students' Union should also include information about our student groups and the ways January starters can become involved in extracurricular activities while studying at Royal Holloway.

### 3. Course Structure

Throughout the Policy Inquiry the Students' Union repeatedly asked students to list one thing they would change about their experience and course structure was a recurring comment made by students.

3.1 The University should clearly identify in each postgraduate course prospectus whether teaching for that course will occur at the Egham or London Campus. This information should be uploaded to the main Royal Holloway website by a set date each academic year. Providing concrete information about the teaching location for a course will give students accurate information about their course and allow them to make a conscious decision around housing and whether they would like to study at that specific campus. There were complaints throughout our policy inquiry about students feeling misled about the location they would study at and the consequences of believing they were studying at the Egham Campus when they were in fact situated in Central London. Housing and commuter status were the biggest complaints made by students who experienced this during the 2022-23 academic year.

- 3.2 The University should include a list of separate term dates for January starters on their main University website, the Student Intranet and the Royal Holloway App. This list of dates should include students' start date, teaching terms and the general dissertation deadlines for both January Models. There is currently no central information page for January postgraduate taught students where they could look up key dates for their degree, and this should be remedied as soon as possible to avoid confusion about the length and structure of the course.
- 3.3 The University should include a clear explanation about the difference between the two January Models on their main website, the Student Intranet and the Royal Holloway App. A list of courses assigned to each Model should also be included for further clarification about the course structure. The University should also be transparent on the course prospectus about which courses follow the Model 1 or Model 2 timeline. Communicating this information more clearly would allow students to better understand the structure of their course before making a final decision on whether to enrol at Royal Holloway. Some students might not want to submit a dissertation before they complete both terms of teaching, and the lack of information about the different model timelines could be considered misleading and have a real impact on a student's decision to undertake a postgraduate taught degree at Royal Holloway.

#### 4. Organisation

There is a strong consensus among current postgraduate taught students that there are recurring timetable and organisational issues within departments that should be streamlined and improved with an aim to increase their overall satisfaction of the course.

- 4.1 The University should investigate whether the current timetabling software is fit for purpose and assess whether a better alternative may be available for use. As a short-term solution, the University should work with departments to identify best practice in this area, such as the use of provisional timetables when selecting modules
- 4.2 Schools and departments should review their timetable process and ensure postgraduate taught students receive their schedules before the start of term and that all information is accurate and up to date before teaching commences. A high frequency comment in our Term One survey highlighted that a high proportion of students experienced numerous timetable delays and incorrect schedules after the start of term which negatively impacted their induction period and learning experience.
- 4.3 The University, Schools and departments should review whether block mode teaching is fit for purpose and the best course structure for postgraduate taught students at Royal Holloway. There were repeated requests to spread teaching out more evenly across the week in all our surveys this academic year. Student dissatisfaction with the number of contact hours with staff and the total number of teaching hours each week was another recurring issue in all three surveys, and Schools and departments should consider whether postgraduate taught

students have reduced access to professional and academic staff in comparison to undergraduates and postgraduate research students.

4.4 The University, Schools and departments should review the timetable structure for postgraduate taught students and whether they could benefit from the Wednesday afternoons off in a similar vein to undergraduate students which would allow them to participate in sports club events and other extracurricular opportunities.

## 5. Assessments

There are currently issues with the scheduling and communication of assessments as well as recurrent deadline stacking within departments.

5.1 School Administration teams should generate an annual report scrutinising exam and assessment hand-in dates for postgraduate taught students to ensure clashes and deadline stacking is avoided within departments.

5.2 Schools and departments should ensure that postgraduate students receive their exam schedules by a set date to ensure students have enough time to prepare for the assessment. Times, locations and dates should be correct and up to date when students receive this information. Any changes that are made should be done so in a timely manner before the assessment date, and it should be communicated to students both in person and in writing to ensure they receive the updated information.

5.3 Departments should review marking criteria and whether deadlines to return feedback to postgraduate students are consistent and being implemented correctly across all modules.

## 6. Careers and Employability

Careers support for postgraduate taught students could be improved both within the University professional services as well as academic departments.

6.1 The University Careers Service and departments should review their current provision of support and funding for postgraduate taught students and highlight gaps in their services.

6.2 Departments should conduct audits of their courses for postgraduate taught students and create a supporting document which outlines learned skills students should expect to gain while undertaking the course. This document should be shared with students at the start of each course. Recurring feedback throughout the policy inquiry was that students were dissatisfied with the lack of practical elements in their course. A review and properly signposted document detailing the practical experience students acquire could, perhaps, improve satisfaction in this area.

6.3 The University's Careers Service should implement a separate Career's Fair for postgraduate taught and research students. This event should incorporate

further study information for postgraduate taught students as well as career opportunities for positions for both academic and non-academic career routes. The Careers Service should additionally hold at least one event on both the Egham and London locations during the academic year.

6.4 Schools and departments should review their budgets and consider running smaller, coordinated careers events for postgraduate taught students throughout the academic year.

## 7. The Dissertation or Final Project

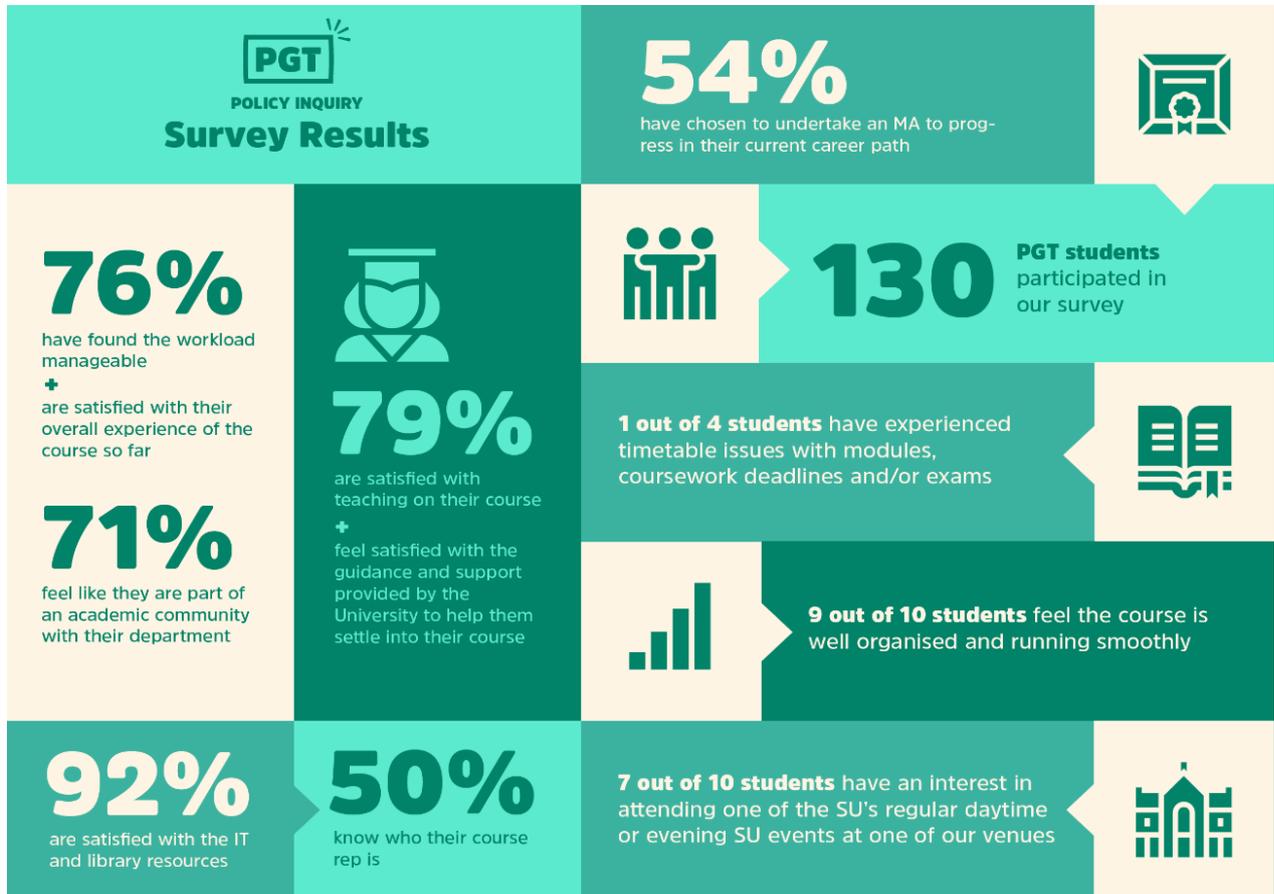
7.1 The University should conduct a full review at the end of the 2023-24 academic year which examines the experience of January postgraduate taught students who underwent the Model 2 timeline. This review should consider whether students received information about the different structure of the course before enrolment, and whether submitting the dissertation before undertaking a second term of teaching was positively received by students. During the policy inquiry the Students' Union learned that there were January postgraduate taught students who thought their degree was condensed into nine months because the dissertation was due in the autumn, and they had no knowledge about the second term of teaching that was to occur in Term One of the 2023-24 academic year.

## **Appendix A**

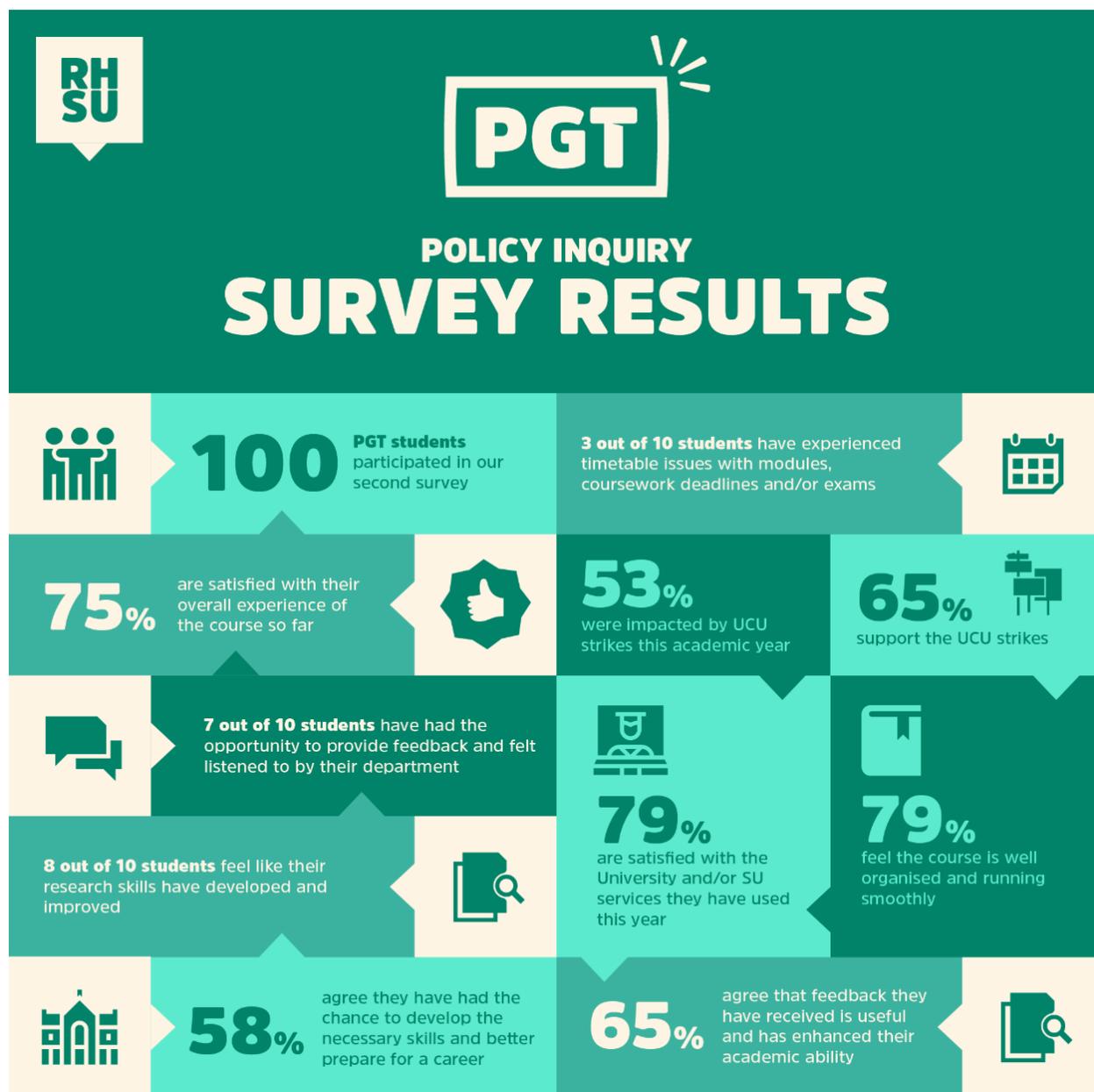
A detailed guide to our three survey questionnaires, focus group questions and information about respondent numbers and cash prizes can be accessed [here](#).

## Appendix B: Infographics

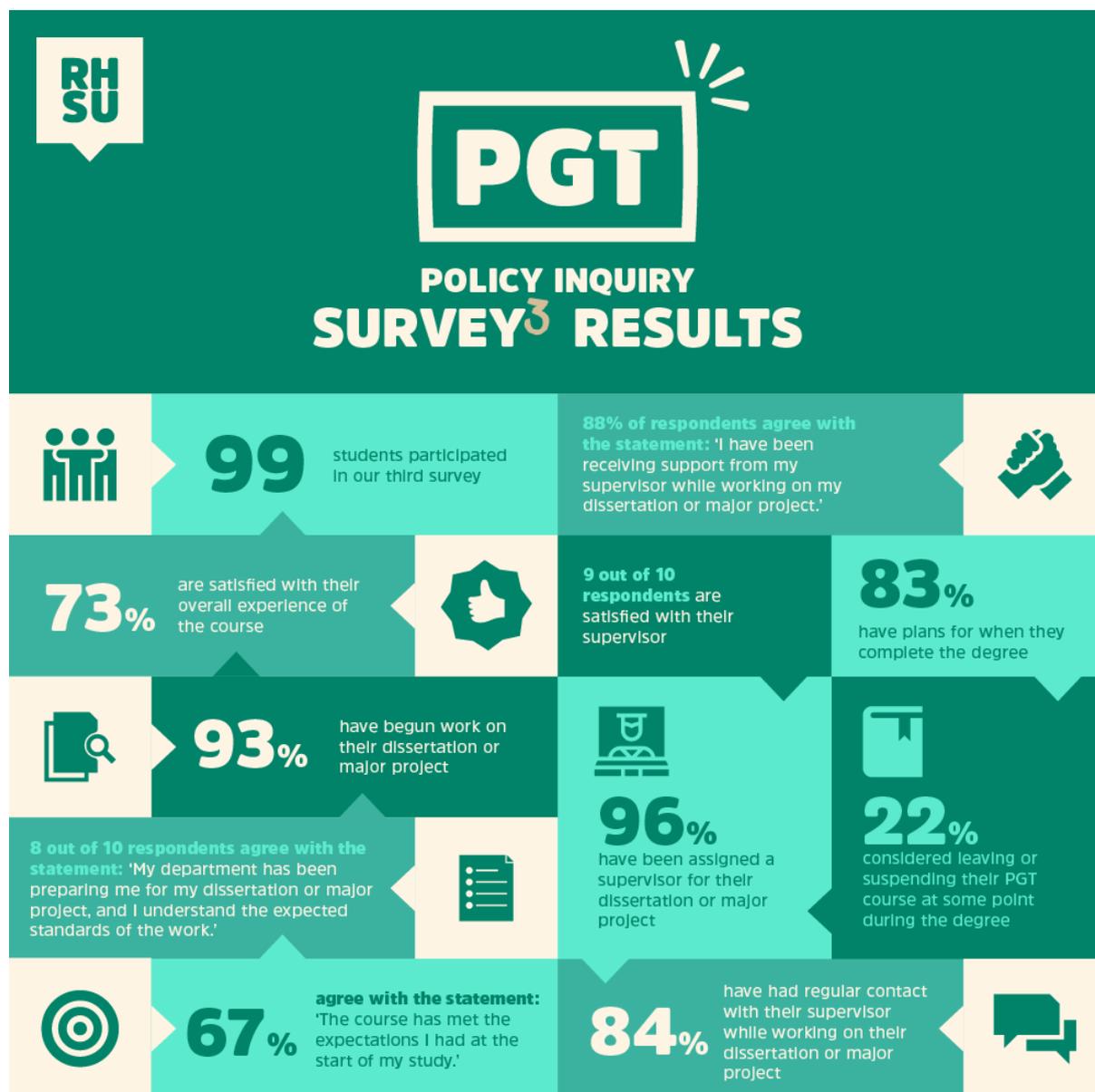
The below infographics present some of the results for the Term One survey and was shared in a blogpost on the Students' Union website and our social media accounts on 15 February 2023.



The below infographics present some of the results for the Term Three survey and was shared in a blogpost on the Students' Union website and our social media accounts on 12 July 2023



The below infographics present some of the results for the summer survey and was shared in a blogpost on the Students' Union website and our social media accounts on 6 October 2023.



## Works Cited

QAA Scotland, 'What is mastersness?' (July 2013) <[https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/what-is-mastersness.pdf?sfvrsn=3a47f581\\_12](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaas/enhancement-and-development/what-is-mastersness.pdf?sfvrsn=3a47f581_12)> [accessed 2 March 2022]

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May 2024