Speak Week 2019/20

Background & Rationale

Why we do this

SRUCSA first ran Speak Week in 2018 as we were aware, through feedback from campus councils and conversations with students, that students at SRUC didn't feel listened to. We wanted to run a campaign that helped give students a voice and that improved communication between SRUC senior management and the student body.

Aim

To give students studying at SRUC the opportunity to raise the issues that matter to them and to receive transparent and clear feedback from SRUC.

Objectives

- Carry out a qualitative survey that allows students to raise the issues that matter to them in an anonymous manner.

- Give students the opportunity to say what they love about SRUC, not just what they want to change.

- Make the survey format more interesting, so it's not just another boring survey, and encourage student engagement and participation.

- Transcribe all responses and carry out Qualitative Data Analysis.

- Produce a report from the results and present to SRUC senior management for response and feedback.

- Present SRUC's responses and feedback to students, regarding the issues they have raised, in a transparent format.

How we did this

During the week of the 25th to the 29th of November Speak Week stalls were set up at each campus and students were encouraged to take part through postcards submissions, telling us what they "Love about SRUC" and what they "Would change about SRUC". Where possible the stalls were manned by SRUCSA officers during lunchtimes, allowing officers to interact with students in-person to increase engagement. However, the postcards and collection boxes were available to students at each stall throughout the whole week, allowing students to complete anonymous feedback submissions at any time.

Participation in Speak Week was promoted via social media and poster campaigns on each campus. SRUCSA also held Campus Councils throughout the week at the Oatridge and Aberdeen campuses, where students in attendance were asked to take part and class representatives received postcards to distribute amongst their peers.

When completing the postcard submissions students were directed to consider the following five areas, in relation to their experience of studying at SRUC:

- Course Content

- Facilities and Resources

- Course Delivery

- Assessment and Feedback

- Help and Support

1 - I <3 SRUC card

2 - What would you change card

Analysis

Response cards were collected at each campus and the end of Speak Week. Handwritten cards were transcribed into electronic format, while online responses were exported directly from the online survey provider. Analysis was carried out using NVivo 12 Pro and Excel. Familiarisation was carried out by read-throughs of physical cards and transcription files. The text was coded in NVivo and codes refined over multiple reads. Word clouds were created in NVivo to explore the mood of each campuses responses.

Stemmed words grouping was used for clarity and to reduce repetition of similar words (e.g. animal/animals).

How many people were involved

Overall 525 comments were received from students across SRUC's six campuses. Student engagement with Speak Week varied between each campus, but overall participation was largely as expected and similar to last year. Elmwood Campus had the highest participation rate, with 182 comments received, and Edinburgh Campus had the lowest participation rate, with 28 comments received.

Of the 525 comments received, 215 (41%) related to things students **love** about studying at SRUC and 310 (59%) related to things students would like to **change** at SRUC.

'Love'

Aberdeen 89

Ayr 13

Barony 65

Edinburgh 10

Elmwood 89

Oatridge 48

D/L 18

'Change'

Aberdeen 105

Ayr 13

Barony 68

Edinburgh 19

Elmwood 93

Oatridge 91

D/L 20

The Thematic Areas

Facilities & resources

Facilities & resources is the area that was most heavily coded during analysis. The availability of appropriate resources is clearly important to student success and overall experience.

Students had plenty of positive things to say about facilities & resources, with 2 main areas coming through. Course-specific facilities were praised, particularly new ACU and gamekeeping facilities. These units have recently received investment and significant upgrades, and this is clearly enhancing the student learning experience. Libraries also came through strongly, especially at Barony, Elmwood, and Aberdeen.

Although these responses are encouraging, the category 'What I would change… (facilities & resources)' had the most coverage of all the areas of interest. Farms and golf facilities are of concern, with students feeling there is a need for upgrades and maintenance.

IT-related topics received little feedback this year, which may reflect the progress made by IDS over the last few years. Aberdeen students have issues with wifi coverage in the Student Hub. Apart from this, comments referred to improving the use of pre-existing IT resources by teaching staff; such as updating Moodle content or using the Digital Classroom more often.

Food is a topic that is always close to students' hearts, and this year's responses were no exception. Although catering has now been unified across SRUC under Baxter Storey, students are still struggling with the burden of food prices. There was also cross-campus commentary on the quality of canteen food, particularly at breakfast and evening meals for residents. We will seek to organise a meeting with Baxter Storey management in coming weeks, to give them this feedback directly and discuss possible solutions.

Residences and social facilities were very strong themes this year. Residents would like to see *residences* refreshed to provide a more comfortable and welcoming living space. The cost of residences is also a concern for students.

It was no surprise to us that *social facilities and activities* are in demand by students on campuses with residences. We hear this often at campus councils and through our other interactions with students. We have streamlined the SRUCSA funding process to try and encourage students to set up their own activities. However, uptake on our funding offer is poor and very few students put themselves forward to organise clubs or social events. It is not possible for SRUCSA sabbaticals and staff to run an activities program at each campus alongside our representational commitments, and Campus Officer coverage is patchy. We are currently working towards a restructuring of SRUCSA which will result in more full-time

officers, this may provide sabbaticals with a small amount of extra time in which to run occasional events. However, it is our opinion that it is time for SRUC to make a commitment to providing an improved experience for residential students. What this looks like may be very different between faculties and campuses, with the respective Deans the best placed to look at solutions relative to the local context. We will be happy to work with the Deans, residential, and any other relevant staff to find solutions to this ongoing problem.

Course content & delivery

The academic areas of course content and course delivery showed some common themes. Consistently, we receive feedback from students of all levels stating that they want more practicals, fieldwork, trips, or other type of practical experience. This was overwhelmingly the main aspect raised under the 'course content' section. Many of the courses delivered at SRUC are highly vocational, with elements of practical work on nearly all courses. Interestingly, students on courses with a high loading of practical elements (e.g. NCs) still ask for more practical sessions/lessons. This shows that SRUC is doing well with practical content and delivery and that these sessions are the most engaging for students. We understand that a good practical/classroom mix is important but sometimes difficult to achieve. Seeing quite how much students value and desire applied work could perhaps guide classroom work, acting as a driver for more interactivity.

There was a strong theme around the *variety* of course content. Students on animal-related courses, in particular, would like to see more variety, some examples included working with a wider range of species, or the option to carry out dissection to enhance understanding of anatomy. Other respondents commented positively on the variety of modules and the choice that this offered them.

Students were able to identify good teaching practice and stated that it helped them most when teaching is "*interactive*", "*dynamic*", "*engaging*", and "*enjoyable*". Although this is encouraging, students across all campuses stated that delivery can be *static*, particularly when PowerPoint presentations are heavily used.

The *pace* of delivery also came out as an important aspect for respondents, particularly although not exclusively at FE focussed campuses. These students felt like their course feels "*rushed*" or "*full-on*". Suggestions from students included balancing delivery and workload across the year, and even increasing contact time. This could also be linked to the key finding in the assessment and feedback area.

Assessment & feedback

The main theme that arose in this section was that the **assessment load and bunching** are still a major concern.

Assessment feedback (quality & timing) is a sector issue, and the picture coming through Speak Week is mixed. Encouraging comments were received from Aberdeen, Barony, and Elmwood students, stating that results are returned quickly. However, all campuses except Oatridge also received comments requesting faster feedback!

Students stated that they appreciate **clear, constructive feedback** that helps them achieve learning outcomes and improve their performance in subsequent assessments. Comments were received from across SRUC asking for more useful feedback, or **alternative feedback methods** such as 1-to-1 sessions.

Help & support

One of the big hitters is that students love their support network. Many staff were mentioned by name. There is clearly an appreciation of the support received through formal support staff; but also of that provided by lecturing staff, which actually received more comments. We know that the *student-lecturer relationship* is key to success, and the number of comments received shows that our staff are instrumental to students' sense of belonging and ability. All campuses will be happy to hear that they all received positive comments (including distance learning).

Alongside the heart-warming comments, there was still a call for an increase in *support services* generally, as well as increased access to both support staff and tutors. One suggestion involved public calendars, to be able to see when individual staff are available in their office.

There were also a small number of worrying comments from students reporting bullying, lack of confidence in the disciplinary/complaints system, and animal abuse from other students. We know that SRUC will see these incidents as seriously as we do. The nature of Speak Week is that data collection is anonymous, which can help students to report issues such as these. As such, it is not possible to follow up with the individuals concerned. However, pastoral staff at the relevant campuses have been contacted and we will help them and other staff at campus level to identify where further investigation is required. Similar instances have also been reported through SLCs this year, as such SRUC should already be aware that this is a problem for some students.

Community

Interestingly, a new theme arose that we had not accounted for in our chosen prompts: community. Comments such as *"Real sense of belonging in a community of like-minded people"* summarise well the feeling expressed by respondents. Staff and the student cohort were frequently described as *"friendly"*; something which we're sure you'll agree should continue to be cultivated. It would be indiscreet of us to announce which of the faculties is the 'friendliest', as cooperation builds more community feeling than competition, so for now let's just say it was definitely yours (wherever you are based).

Campus Highlights

Broadly similar issues were raised across the SRUC campuses, apart from in specific resource-based instances such as campuses with residences. For this reason, we have looked at the themes as a whole

and made cross-faculty recommendations (see The Thematic Areas), including campus-specific points where relevant.

This section shows the word clouds analysed in NVivo, these give an interesting overview of the mood of the comments received at each campus. A number of supporting quotes from each campus are also shown to illustrate our themes in the students' own words.

Aberdeen

Love

"The small class sizes are ideal and the lecturers are very passionate and knowledgable."

"Taught in a way that is reasonably easy to understand with many different ways to catch up."

Change

"Student accommodation - terrible, cleaning isn't good, and not up to date for the amount of money."

"There is limited space for relaxed socialising on-site between classes finishing and the bar opening."

Ayr

Love

"Good level of feedback given"

"Approachable lecturers"

Change

"Update Moodle with relevant slides"

"Students need extra information about course content before starting course"

Barony

Love

"It's fun, lecturers always ensure everyone understands"

"Good supply of notes given and involving students"

"There is a good variety of animals down at the ATCT to learn from"

Change

"Use computers & digital classroom more"

"Complaints taken more seriously"

Edinburgh

Love

"Lecturers are enthusiastic and positive"

"Very good <support> from student services"

Change

"Split up lectures into shorter time frames - 3 hours too long"

"Data collection & handling should be a core subject as it links into all subjects "

Elmwood

Love

"It's like a family, always feel welcomed"

"Course content is relevant and covers a vast amount of the industry"

Change

"Poor facilities and resources for doing anything bar studying"

"The course is very full going on from NC - course college days may need extending to 3.5 to 4 days to aid the jump"

Oatridge

Love

"Everyone here is very friendly + helpful. The course is interesting and keeps you engaged and the lecturers help to bring out the best in you"

"It's a good opportunity to meet new people and experience new things while studying something you love doing"

Change

"Improve farm, more concrete repairs"

"Spread out assessments"

"Less assessments, more projects"