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Our learning experience at Bath prepares us to change the world

We are ambitious. We are curious, inquisitive, sociable and engaged in our education.

We come here to learn - from leading academics, inspiring teaching and cutting-edge technology - so that we can change the world. We want to ensure we can all access the outstanding learning opportunities at the University and make the most of these opportunities when being taught, when on placement and/or undertaking research. We also want to learn from each other, and our wider community. And we want to learn how to do things for ourselves. We will only change the world when we can work with, inspire and influence others.

We think that learning is changing. Artificial Intelligence isn't just about academic integrity – it has tremendous possibility for the future of learning and life. We must find ways to address this shift in society to enable a future-proof learning experience.

We believe that our learning should help us **change the world - we think that clear support for independent study that builds our confidence and cutting-edge teaching, learning and assessment will help us do so.**

For us, **learning** is about four things:

❶ A consistently **high-quality** teaching and learning experience - where delivering the basics removes barriers, and we are given the **feedback** we need to apply our knowledge, not just repeat it for assessments.
❷ Being able to access, influence and be exposed to the **real world** outside of the classroom.
❸ The best **support for learning** available - from the University and each other.
❹ A supportive, nurturing and bespoke environment for **research students**.

Students told us:

High quality teaching

The University of Bath scores highly year-on-year in the *National Student Survey* with regards to the quality of teaching students receive and sits above the sector average. This together with the achievement of TEF triple Gold, shows a high level of learning and teaching at the University. Students told us during the *Together We Shape Tomorrow* engagement about the positive impacts that stimulating and interested academic staff made to their academic experience.
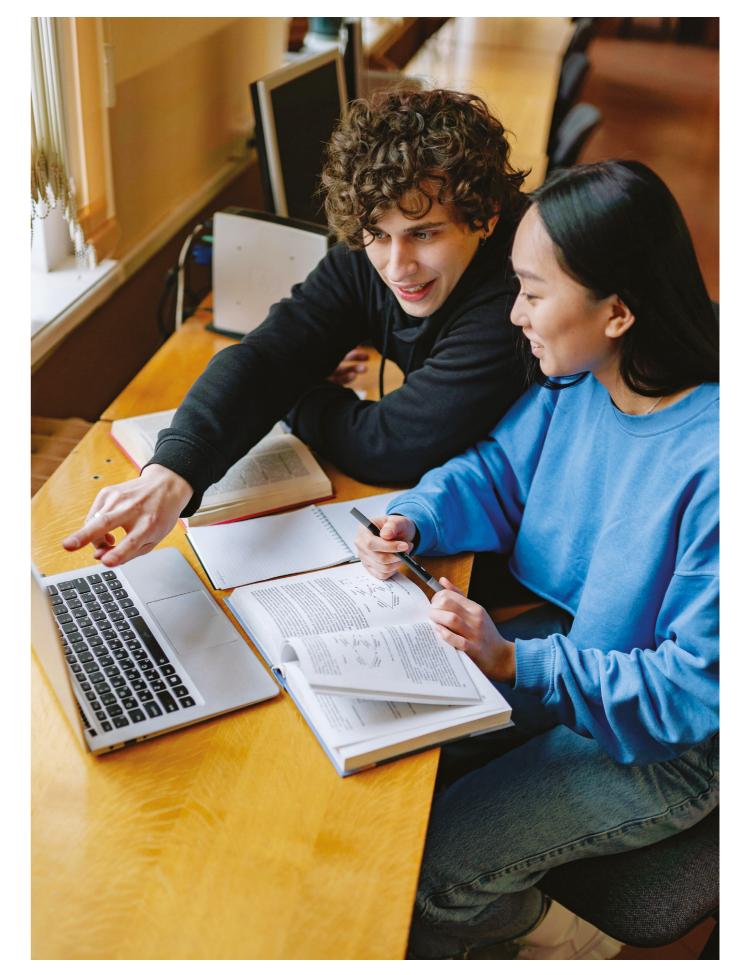
However, there are inconsistencies, and students also told us about staff who were disinterested in the subjects and students, who relied too much on old, repeated content and reading from slides. Students told us they benefit from passionate and helpful lecturers and an interactive course delivery. The *National Student Survey optional bank 2024* showed that course delivery was an area of concern for students, particularly that the delivery of the course has not been stimulating. This was also one of the key themes raised by student Academic Representatives in Staff Student Liaison Committees.

Prospective students at open days told us that even before choosing their course or university of study, they are already thinking ahead to wanting a good outcome with a good career post-graduation.

Feedback on teaching is primarily collected through all student surveys (National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey), Online Unit Evaluations, and student representative feedback shared at Staff Student Liaison Committees. There are clear inconsistencies with regards to how students are involved in action planning following NSS and PTES (and PRES/PDES) results being available.
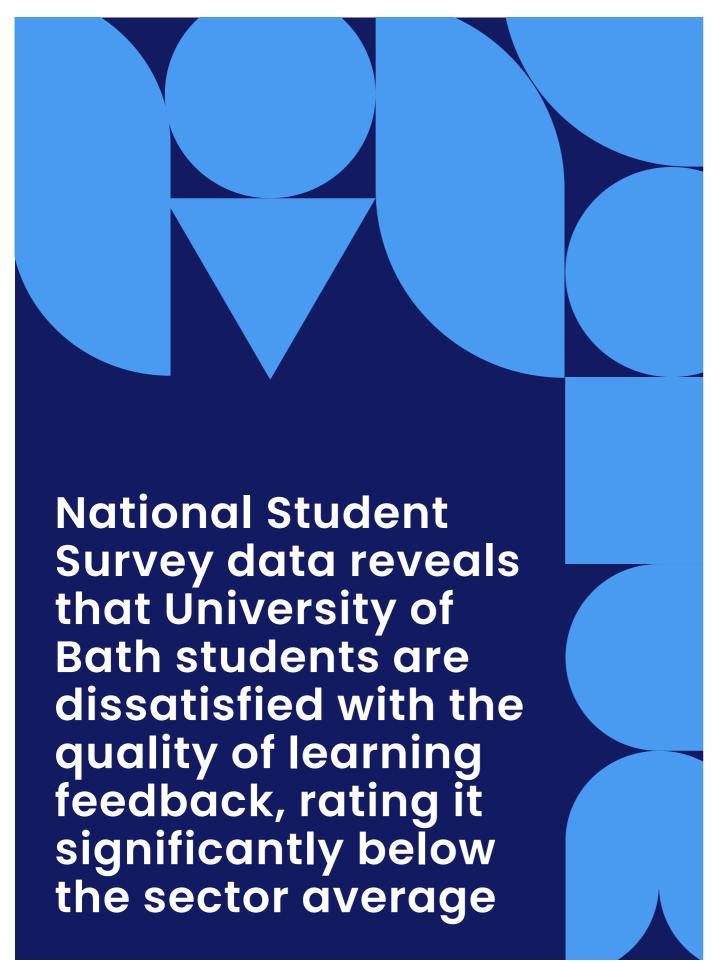
THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH CONSISTENTLY SCORES ABOVE THE SECTOR AVERAGE IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY FOR QUALITY OF TEACHING

COURSE DELIVERY WAS AN AREA OF CONCERN FOR STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY THAT THE DELIVERY OF THE COURSE HAS NOT BEEN STIMULATING

National Student Survey data reveals that University of Bath students are dissatisfied with the quality of learning feedback, rating it significantly below the sector average

Assessment and Feedback

They also told us about issues with assessment and feedback - including unfair grading, a lack of timely and constructive feedback, and inconsistencies across units.

Year-on-year *National Student Survey* data shows that students are not happy when it comes to feedback that helps them to learn. Bath is significantly below the sector average in this area and students are asking for clear and constructive feedback that helps them improve their academic work *(Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement)*.

Despite assessment and feedback being an SU Top Ten priority issue nine times since 2011/12, and multiple working groups to tackle the issues, students continue to be unhappy. They told us that they are:

- Frustrated with delays in receiving feedback, leading to difficulties in applying the feedback to future assessments and improving their performance.
- Lacking the detail or specifics needed in their feedback to help them understand where they went wrong or how they can enhance their work.
- Noting inconsistencies in feedback quality between different markers or departments.
- Concerned when their work is marked by individuals who lack expertise in the specific subject area, leading to feedback that may not be relevant or useful.

Students value feedback as a crucial component of their academic development, but improvements to timeliness, detail, consistency and relevance is necessary to enhance their learning experience and help them to reach their full potential.

Students want to perform to their best and, to do this, need the tools to help them to succeed in their assessments. Students told us about limited availability to past papers, exemplar answers or solutions to exam questions, and needing clarity in assessment criteria to help them to achieve their potential *(Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement)*.

Group work continues to be a contentious form of assessment, whilst some students thrived and welcomed opportunities to simulate real working situations alongside others, others raised concerns about the frequency it is used as an assessment method for some courses and how unequal contributions from group members are dealt with and the impact on individual grades.

"Far too much group coursework, particularly in the final year of my degree - it becomes about who you know, how clever your group is and how hard everyone in the group is willing to work. This is not fair at all and often I felt I did far more work than others in my groups" - National Student Survey 2024 open comments

Real world influence

Students reflected on the positive impact that having real world influences on their courses had, from connections with industry, to 'real-life' application of course content, and the chance to undertake a placement to apply their learning and develop key skills *(Together We Shape Tomorrow engagement)*. 52.17% *(NSS 2024 question B5.5)* of students agreed that the taught portion of their course prepared them for placement, indicating room for improvement in managing student expectations and preparedness for this aspect of learning.

Within The SU, every year over 4,000 students participate in voluntary roles, either volunteering for local charities or projects, or as a student leader giving back to the student community at the University of Bath. Many students were frustrated that their learning and skills developed from voluntary activity was not formally recognised, and for many others, the option to engage with these opportunities is not possible due to financial constraints.

Doctoral students told us that they do not have the capacity to take on additional voluntary or student leadership roles due to the pressures of both their research and teaching demands. Almost 70% of doctoral students report taking on paid teaching roles alongside their research *(Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023)*. Therefore, they are not able to engage with the same level of opportunities as their postgraduate taught or undergraduate peers.

Support for learning

As previously mentioned, students spoke positively about the support they received from staff to support their learning, academic and professional services staff linked to their course or department/ the School. The University of Bath scores incredibly highly on questions related to academic support and organisation and management in the *National Student Survey* and is above the sector average.

However, students told us that workload and bunching of assessments are not supportive for their learning. Workload had been consistently low scored in the optional bank of questions in the *National Student Survey* from 2017 onwards. Students do not agree that their workload is manageable, the course applies unnecessary pressures on them, they cannot always complete work to their satisfaction due to the volume of work, and they generally do not have enough time to understand the things they have learnt.

We heard from students the negative impact of bunched assessments and high workloads on their mental health and students have less time available to them due to needing to work alongside their studies.

We have heard some instances of placement students falling between the cracks if things go awry when on placement, and misunderstandings about responsibilities for pastoral care - particularly, what issues should be raised to the employer and their responsibilities, and how or whether the University can or should support students in these instances.

The usage of GenAI is steadily growing. Student Academic Representatives raised concerns about the consideration of their impact on idea generation and creativity, timesaving, and accuracy checking. Students call for more vigilance in reviewing literature, both in terms of reliability and potential copyright issues; they are worried about non-native English speakers who may lean more on AI when lacking confidence in expressing their ideas. They raised questions about the future of education, raising doubts about the fairness and effectiveness of assessing students using AI. Whilst AI is likely to become more featured in the future, students want to see support and guidance from the University as well as opportunities to explore what it has to offer.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BATH SCORES WELL ABOVE THE SECTOR AVERAGE IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY FOR ACADEMIC SUPPORT, ORGANISATION, AND MANAGEMENT
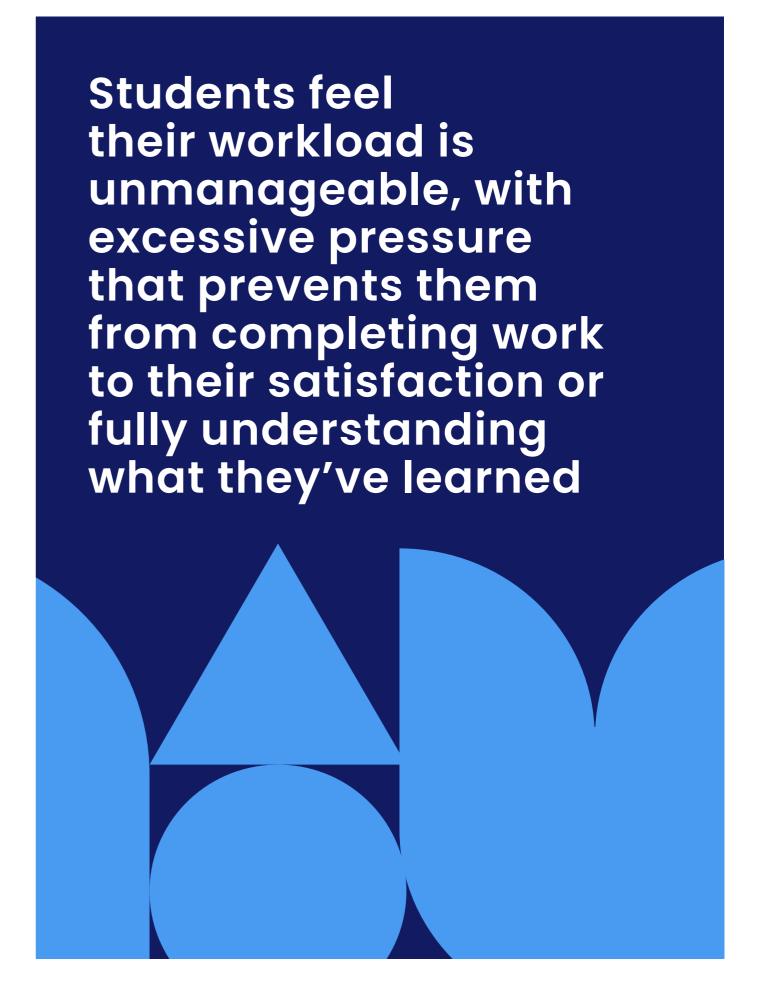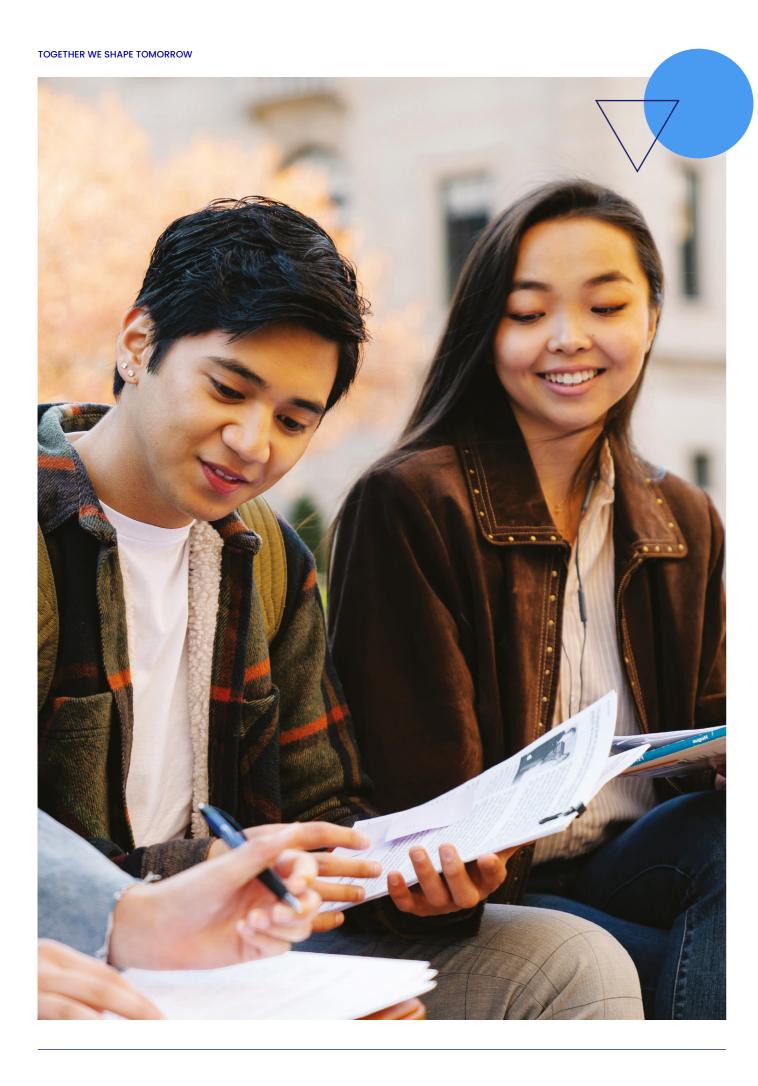
Research students

Doctoral students have noted a shift in staff contact to being a mix of in-person and online, and spending more time themselves working off campus, with meetings held virtually becoming more accepted.

The dynamic between doctoral students and staff is markedly different when compared to other student groups: doctoral students' primary point of contact is their supervisor and researchers in their field, creating a dynamic that resembles colleagues more than student-teacher. This dynamic is exacerbated by the fact that many doctoral students take on paid teaching work, often placing them in a grey area between staff and students.

As one student stated:
"In my department, I get the feeling that staff don't really respect PhD students' opinions as much, and ultimately the PhD students are considered as staff when it's convenient to, but as students when our opinions are too controversial or they don't want to listen." – Department of Biology & Biochemistry PRES Open Text Comment

Students feel their workload is unmanageable, with excessive pressure that prevents them from completing work to their satisfaction or fully understanding what they've learned

On high quality **teaching and learning,** we want to see:

❶ Every member of academic staff to hold a relevant teaching qualification - and for all staff to be trained to embed wellbeing in the curriculum and its delivery, including those who support placement, PGT and Doctoral students.

❷ A systems approach that ensures that all students can access academic support, including contacting and getting timely responses from academics, including during the placement.

❸ Deeper, granular learning in partnership with students on the cause of poor NSS, PTES and PRES scores - with action plans for improvement in every subject area.

On the **world** outside of the classroom, we want to see:

❶ A work- and volunteering-first academic model, where academic credit is awarded and time able to be taken on every programme for the learning that students get from taking responsibility and serving others.

❷ A switch over time to a career design[7] approach that enables us to integrate sustainability, employability, health, and well-being in our long-term plans - with a range of activities, both in house and with partners, that help us get there. And enhanced support for every student to start their own business - and where self-employment is neither possible nor allowed, a commitment to employ and engage student staff as managers, supervisors and decision-makers in every aspect of campus delivery.

❸ Ensuring students understand the expectations they will face during placement and that this is addressed during the taught portion of their course.

❹ The climate emergency reflected as a key priority of the University, and collaboration with students to build an ambitious plan to address sustainability.

❺ A review of transition support to the job market for international students, including promotion of post-study work visas as means to access student talent to small and medium enterprises, a review of support for students on and obtaining placements, and a deeper understanding of international labour markets.

On **support for learning,** we want to see:

❶ A review of all shared facilities, services, spaces and software to determine demand, assure capacity and identity and eradicate "pinch points".

❷ A guarantee of proper support and consistent approach for groupwork - enabling students to understand how to get the best from each other, hold each other to commitments when made and raise issues and get support when things go wrong.

❸ A guarantee of proper support and consistent approach for placement - enabling students to understand how to get the best from this portion of their degree, and how and where to raise issues and get support from employers and the University if things go wrong.

❹ A commitment to review curricula and assessment with AI in mind - reassessing what it is that we want graduates to be able to do, with a focus on knowledge creation and application at all levels - moving away from regurgitation and synthesis. There should also be digital literacy programs to help all students and staff develop essential skills for the AI age.

On **research students,** we want to see:

❶ Supervisors limited to a manageable number of supervisees to ensure quality guidance and support. Clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors to ensure consistent and effective support for research students, with appropriate training provided. Doctoral students should have the right to refuse additional assignments not directly connected to their research if they impede their primary objectives as agreed with their supervisor.

❷ Opportunities for doctoral students to develop skills in leadership, teamwork, project management, teaching, and supervision. Doctoral studies should include broad and flexible modules to develop general competences. Integration of professional development opportunities within the doctoral curriculum should be supported.

❸ Viva panels should provide feedback to both students and supervisors, including independent members to ensure impartiality. Research students should be encouraged to participate in professional development activities and gain experience as academics through teaching and supporting undergraduate courses to prepare research students for academic and professional careers.

[7]Career design at the university of Aalto