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**Speak Week**

**Introduction**

The purpose of Speak Week was to gather as many student opinions as possible, during the period of one week. Student opinions were gathered via Speak Week comment cards, speak week posters and an online speak week form. On each of the feedback methods, there were three areas for students to give us feedback: ‘Your Guild’, ‘Your University’ and ‘Your Community’.

The posters were stuck up around the Guild for students to write on and information about the online form was sent out on an all student email. The plan for the comment cards was to have a stall in the ilounge in the library which was to be run by volunteer Student Reps and Guild Councillors and Guild Officers. Several of the officers were responsible for distributing and collecting cards to their respective groups; VPHC – RAs, VPSN – Sports Teams, VPAD – Student Groups. Each of the Non-Sabbatical Officers were asked to collect a pile of cards to take to Association meetings. The mentors and Officers also distributed and collected comment cards in halls around the meal time and in the evening. Furthermore, Student Voice ran a short training session for Student Reps and Guild Councillors, explaining Speak Week and asking them to help with distributing and collecting comment cards. Officers were also allocated specific time slots to go out and engage with students directly, asking them to fill in cards, this included door-knocking, targeting specific events and general campus engagement.

**Comments gathered**

The total number of comments collected from Speak Week was 1242, these can be broken down into:

462 ‘Your Guild’ comments

431 ‘Your University’ comments

349 ‘Your Community’ comments

These comments were submitted via:

Posters – 107 comments

Comment cards – 435 cards

Website - 21 responses

Once collected, the comments were processed and categorised into up to three themes. The themes differed for each of the three strands (Guild, University and Community). The graph below shows and overall breakdown of the number of comments for each theme:

For the purpose of analysis – ‘Misc’ will not be considered as a theme as it does not cover one specific issue, with this accounted for, the top ten themes across Speak Week are:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rank | Strand | Theme | No. of comments |
| 1 | University | Learning Resources | 104 |
| 2 | Guild | Engagement | 103 |
|  | ~~University~~ | ~~Misc~~ | ~~100~~ |
| 3 | Guild | Events | 93 |
|  | ~~Community~~ | ~~Misc~~ | ~~91~~ |
| 4 | Community | Student Community | 73 |
| 5 | University | Library | 72 |
|  | ~~Guild~~ | ~~Misc~~ | ~~69~~ |
| 6 | Community | Halls | 67 |
| 7 | Guild | Student Groups | 55 |
| 8 | Community | Waste Disposal | 54 |
| 9 | Community | Personal Safety | 47 |
| 10 | Guild | Amenities Available | 44 |

The majority of miscellaneous comments in all three areas were short, positive comments such as; ‘it’s great’, ‘love it’ and ‘I like it’. In the top ten themes, the Guild has the highest number of total comments and the University has the lowest. This suggests that there are stronger opinions and themes from students regarding the Guild than the Community and University.

**Your Guild**

The numbers of Guild comments are outlined in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Theme | Comments |
| 1 | Engagement | 103 |
| 2 | Events | 93 |
|  | ~~Misc~~ | ~~69~~ |
| 3 | Student Groups | 55 |
| 4 | Amenities Available | 44 |
| 5 | Food | 44 |
| 6 | Joe's | 36 |
| 7 | Meal Plan | 23 |
| 8 | Staff | 23 |
| 9 | Student Staff Wages | 21 |
| 10 | Breathalyser | 19 |
| 11 | Ticketing | 17 |
| 12 | Institute | 14 |
| 13 | RA Scheme | 12 |
| 14 | Toilets | 11 |
| 15 | Lettings | 6 |
| 16 | Signage | 4 |

Engagement

The comments around engagement focus on a few things; there are comments that focus on people not knowing about the Guild, ‘I think a lot of people don't know/care what the Guild does,’ a few comments noting that they don’t know what it is themselves. There are other comments which address certain under-represented groups and how they are not supported by the Guild, ‘More outreach to postgrad students would be great,’ and ‘You have a HUUUGE problem with engaging international and off-campus students’. There are also comments about the Officer Team – some comments praise them, whilst there are others which note that the Sabbatical Team are not easy to engage with, ‘More availability to talk to Sabbatical leaders.’ There are also some comments about the Guild being ‘cliquey’ and ‘too political’ and this has led to the perception that the Guild isn’t a good/easy to place to engage with. There are also some positive comments about the Guild’s engagement, however they are not particularly specific ‘Really good focal point for student engagement.’

*Our Strategic Plan is all about making it easier for people to find out what is going out in the Guild and being able to influence and engage what we do. In January, we recruited a new member of staff dedicated to making sure all of the most relevant and important information was available via our website, email and social media. We spent a lot of time at the beginning of this year attempting to reform our democratic structures to allow all students have a say and have influence on the Guild through the referendum at the same time as our officer elections. The good news is that it returned a Yes vote but unfortunately it didn’t reach quoracy (the number of votes required for things to change). Lots of work still to be done but this remains a massive priority for the Guild.*

Events & Ticketing

There are substantial number of comments relating to events available to attend, this includes both comments on events currently available and comments on new events that are wanted. The majority of comments about events in the Guild are positive; ‘Good events. Always people there to help you out with any questions,’ and ‘good enjoy Guild events - more please.’

There are a large number of comments which ask for a greater variety of events at the Guild, evening events that are not so ‘night-out’ focussed and cater to a wider variety of people. There are also comments asking for more ‘social events’ and ‘more activities (trips to famous places) for us.’

*There is lots that we can do to diversify our events offer, the General Elections result night was incredibly popular (even if the result wasn’t) and I think there’s a lot we can look at in terms of broadening out what our offer is.*

*‘Fab’*

Whilst this isn’t a specific theme, a lot of comments in the Events, Ticketing and Joe’s/Nights section relate to Fab. A lot of the comments are positive; ‘Fab is great’. However, most of the ticketing comments say that there should be ‘more tickets for Fab’ and a few comments state that the tickets should be cheaper and they should not go on sale when students are in lectures and unable to buy tickets. There are also a number of comments in the ‘Joe’s/Nights’ section which note that drinks prices in Fab are too expensive – a lot of comments seem to generally state that ‘Fab is great but compared with other unis the drink prices are ridiculous.’ Furthermore, there are around 20 comments which ask for breathalysers not to be brought in ‘Don't breathalyse at Fab it will ruin it and nobody will come.’

*In regards to Fab, our drinks are competitively priced and if we were to reduce the prices we would have to increase costs elsewhere which could mean longer queues at the bar or increases in ticket prices. We are unable to offer any more tickets than we do already unless we were to expand the building! In regards to Breathalysers, after the trial we heard you loud and clear and we won’t be bringing them back.*

Joe’s, Food & Meal Plan

There are a number of comments which state that the meal plan cards that students in catered accommodation are issued, should be able to be used in Joe’s. There are also comments about Joe’s opening earlier, reducing food and drink prices and using Joe’s card more widely; ‘Use Joe's Bar card at the Park Bench at Pritchatts Park.’ There are also many positive comments about Joe’s being ‘a nice place to get some food with friends during the daytime.’ There are a number of comments that request that ‘Costa/Subway/Joe's Bar - add to meal plan.’ There are a number of comments about the food outlets in the Guild, a number of comments ask for ‘seating in Subway’ and others compliment the ‘good food’ in Joe’s. Some however call the food in Joe’s ‘poor’ and request ‘cheaper food’ throughout the Guild with more options for ‘Vegans who don’t like boiled beans’ and more Kosher food.

*The Guild is committed in its strategic plan to becoming a Meal Plan provider and we are in advanced talks with the University to make this a possibility. We are also committed to opening a new food outlet within the Guild and we will be launching a survey of students soon on their preferences.*

Student Staff Wages

There are around 20 comments which ask for ‘Living wage for student staff’, noting that ‘Guild pay should equate to University pay’ furthermore, there should be an increase in pay for student staff that have to work unsociable hours, ‘Joe's staff need unsociable pay hours, they work horrendous hours for minimum wage.’

*The Guild’s trustee board in reaction to Guild Council and electoral mandates has being identifying how the Guild can afford to pay its student staff the living wage. We are in consultation with the Living Wage foundation about the best way to proceed with this as the expense is quite a large one. We have previously asked for help from the University to help pay this to bring our student staff in line with theirs. This negotiation was unsuccessful.*

Amenities available

The comments on amenities available are fairly varied; some comments note there is a ‘good support network’, ‘house hunting help is good’ and the ‘RA Scheme is brilliant’. However, there are a number of comments that request more amenities such as; ‘more workshop space and computers,’ ‘More water machines’ and a few comments that note that it is ‘not possible to book rooms for studying.’

*We are currently beginning conversations about how we develop or extend our building including a better utilisation of space. We have also trialled for the first time opening up one of our rooms as a study space during exam time. We are looking at how develop initiatives like this further in the future.*

Student Groups

Many of the comments in this theme note that there are a ‘really good range of societies’ to get involved in and there are lots of opportunities to get involved in. However, a lot of comments note that there are, ‘not enough societies and are very expensive.’ Other than comments generally about Student Groups, there are also comments from students who are clearly in student groups, these include comments about the running of student groups; many comments as for ‘clearer guides for society committees’, ‘fewer forms for Stu Dev’ and ‘stop making things very difficult for societies’. There appears to be a general feeling in the negative comments that ‘everything seems to be a way of trying to prevent (student groups) doing anything.’

*We are really proud of the number and range of groups we support in the Guild. However we realise that there is still a lot of areas of interest that are not covered by our existing activities. We strongly encourage students to start their own groups to pursue their activities to cover any existing gaps. We are aware that costs of joining some groups might be prohibitive for students therefore we are started looking into ways of supporting students to allow them to join groups which they otherwise would not be able to do.*

*Because of our legal obligations as charitable organisation there might seem to be an unusual amount of different processes and procedures that we require student groups to comply with. They are put in place to ensure that we meet our legal obligations in line with charity law as well as to ensure that student activities are run in a safe and fair manner. With the introduction of new post in Student Groups department, responsible for review of our systems and procedures, we are hoping to reduce the amount of paperwork required from student groups. We’ve already identified some processes for low risk activities that have be removed to make it easier for groups to hold their activities. This is part of constant and ongoing review into our procedures with a view to remove as much of them as possible.*

Other

There are many comments which are positive staff within the Guild noting that they are ‘friendly and approachable’. There are a few comments which note that the Reception staff are sometimes rude, and that all staff should be trained on liberation issues.

There are over 10 comments which state that there needs to be more ‘gender neutral toilets’. There are a few comments which request better signage around the building, with one student noting that the Guild is ‘like a maze’. There are a number of comments about the lack of ‘transparency’ in the Guild and trying to ‘strengthen the idea of the Guild as a \*union\* a body there to support and represent students, not just a glorified service provider.’ There are also a few comments about Guild lettings, noting that it should be ‘more organised.’

**Your University**

The numbers of University comments are outlined in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Theme | Comments |
| 1 | Learning Resources | 104 |
|  | ~~Misc~~ | ~~100~~ |
| 2 | Library | 72 |
| 3 | Teaching | 44 |
| 4 | Study Space | 42 |
| 5 | Wifi | 38 |
| 6 | Institutional Structure | 37 |
| 7 | Food | 35 |
| 8 | Amenities | 29 |
| 9 | Staff | 29 |
| 10 | Timetabling | 27 |
| 11 | Toilets | 21 |
| 12 | Activities | 12 |
| 13 | Meal Plan | 9 |
| 14 | Engagement | 8 |
| 15 | Hot Water | 8 |
| 16 | Business School | 8 |

UoB Resources

The most referenced theme in this section was the library with over 70 comments, thus it was deemed appropriate to create a new theme for the ‘library’ comments. Comments about the library include the lack of computers available, the need for more power sockets and a need for the library to be open 24/7. The comments about learning resources ask for ‘More contact time’, ‘more organised and clearer course structure on CANVAS,’ and for lecturers to be recorded. There are several comments about the lack of support available to students be it support with work or welfare support. There are also nearly 40 comments about the poor quality of wifi on campus and that this needs to be improved.

There are also a number of comments asking for more study spaces for students on campus outside of the library, more computer study spaces available and more power sockets available in study spaces. There were also a number of comments about there ‘not being enough group study rooms’ for students.

*The Guild has met with the Director of IT services to discuss Wi-Fi connectivity. Most of campus should allow for 3 devices per seat by the end of May with the new library, once finished will have better connectivity but issues are created when Wi-Fi channels are ‘swamped’ by people using their phones as Wi-Fi hotspots. The New Library will allow for a plug for every seat in the Library, the current Library is at its capacity so therefore cannot take anymore plugs than it currently does. We have fed back these comments to the people responsible for the Library, wifi and study spaces.*

Teaching, Organisation and Management

There are a number of comments about good teaching and interesting lectures at the University of Birmingham, ‘All subjects are very interesting and the teachers are good’. There are also comments about lecturers being ‘approachable’ and ‘always available’. However, there are also a number of comments that suggest that lecturers seem ‘disinterested’ and just ‘read off the slides’ and appear to see students as an ‘annoyance’. There are however a few comments about the staff in departments being ‘kind’.

There are several comments about the scheduling of deadlines ‘For History, you don't get your feedback back for your first essay until after your second and third essays are due’, and ‘Stop putting all POLSIS deadlines on the same day.’ There are also some requests for courses that do not currently have them, to have a reading week, and for ‘more communication between departments for JH (joint honours) students.’

*The Guild has been working with the University to push for the better scheduling of deadlines and assessments. We are trying to crack down on cases on a case by case basis and have also asked that course convenors plan an assessment schedule so that you receive feedback before your next assessment is set. We have also been working closely with the University to develop the Teaching Academy, focussing on supporting and improving Teaching at the University through professional development and recognition. The Guild has also launched in partnership with the University ‘The Outstanding Teaching Awards’ to positively recognise those who are good Teaching staff but also to take on board what students to be good teaching.*

Amenities Available

There are a few comments throughout the themes that request better ‘access for people with disabilities,’ and ‘less alienation of disabled students’ with comment asking for ‘more ramps on campus’. There are also a number of comments which ask for more hot water facilities across campus; ‘We need more hot water facilities.’

There are a number of comments which express dissatisfaction with the high price for sport club/gym membership, the general sentiment appears to be that ‘playing a sport shouldn't be so expensive’. There are also around 20 comments which express dissatisfaction with the toilets across campus, these are broken down into requests for ‘more gender neutral toilets’ and a general lack of cleanliness in other toilets, ‘toilets are disgusting and only cleaned once a day,’ places specifically mentioned as not being up to standard are, Muirhead Tower, University House, the Library and the Business School. There are also some specific comments about the Business School specifically having ‘rude staff’ in their café and it not smelling very good.

There are a number of comments about the food available on campus, a large number of the comments state that the ‘food is overpriced on campus,’ and that there needs to be ‘more food choices’. The expense of food is reflected in the comments about the meal plan, with students expressing the view that the meal plan ‘is not good value for money.’

In terms of the activities available on campus the comments are mainly positive; ‘lots of extra-curricular activities’ and there is ‘lots to do.’ There are a couple of comments which request ‘more on campus events.’

*Many of these comments are quite specific to departments and certain areas but the comments have been passed onto the relevant people within the University for their comment. There were also a couple of comments for more on campus events. This is a priority for going forward for the Guild next year. Sports fees have a huge variance but the Guild Vice President Sport works hard to ensure that prices for students remain the same and do not increase above inflation.*

**Your Community**

The numbers of Community comments are outlined in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Theme | Comments |
|  | ~~Misc~~ | ~~91~~ |
| 1 | Student Community | 73 |
| 2 | Halls | 67 |
| 3 | Waste Disposal | 54 |
| 4 | Personal Safety | 47 |
| 5 | Amenities Available | 30 |
| 6 | Events available | 26 |
| 7 | Housing Regulations | 10 |
| 8 | Transport | 11 |
| 9 | Toilets | 9 |
| 10 | Food | 6 |
| 11 | Street Lights | 5 |

*Many of these comments were used to inform our General Election manifesto: The Birmingham Asks, a joint project between the Guild of Students and Birmingham City University Students’ Union which can be seen here: http://www.guildofstudents.com/news/article/website/Birmingham-Asks-The-Student-Manifesto/*

Student Community

There are a substantial number of comments about students thinking that the community in both Selly Oak and the halls is ‘friendly’ and ‘safe’. There are a lot of positive comments from students living in halls about the sense of community in their accommodation; ‘very friendly community, tight knit’, ‘incredible atmosphere, friendly people.’ There are however, also comments about engaging with students in the community as equal stakeholders in the area, ‘lobby politicians to start treating students as equal stakeholders in the community,’ and ‘UoB doesn't seems to have many community links on 'student levels'’.

*Much of our work based around the General Election was based on making sure that students were seen as equal stakeholders in their community before, during and after the elections.*

Halls

Whilst there are a lot of positive comments about students living in halls, there are also some negative comments. These include feedback that problems reported in flats take too long to deal with, ‘no one comes to fix things,’ ‘on the Vale we haven't had hot water in my flat for a week and two days and the Hub haven't done anything.’ There are also requests for more laundrettes in Mason and Tennis Courts. There are also a couple of comments that request a free cash machine in Pritchatts Park and Park Bench. The food served in the meal plan is also commented upon, a few students commented that food quality is ‘a bit hit and miss’, and expensive and the meal plan does not last a whole week. As in all the other sections, there are comments requesting ‘more gender neutral toilets’.

There are a number of comments about events, most of which are from students living in halls, most of the comments ask for ‘more events’ or ‘more activities. A few of the things suggested are ‘group outings’, ‘more socialising events to meet new people’ and ‘more events that are not alcohol related’.

*The Guild works really closely with the Residents Associations and the University’s Hospitality and Accommodation services to tackle issues. It’s best to report your issues to maintenance and if they’re not being dealt with then to raise it with your RAs. The Residents Associations work hard to provide a varied and wide ranging social events before specific to halls but also a specific central plan of events too.*

Personal Safety

There are also nearly 50 comments that relate to personal safety in the community, of which only five students say that they feel safe. The remaining comments ask for a ‘safer Selly’, in which students can feel safe, many comments request ‘increased police presence’ and ‘increased awareness of how to keep yourself and house safe’. There are 5 comments that request ‘better lighting down some streets for safety’. Furthermore, there are a few comments that request ‘traffic calming measures on the Bristol Road’, and indicate that road safety around the University is a problem sometimes.

*Personal safety remains a huge priority for the Guild of Students. The Community wardens spend a lot of time working with West Midlands Police to raise awareness and proactively work to prevent theft and burglary.*

Waste Disposal

The other big problem with around 50 comments is waste disposal. Most of the students that commented on bins, recycling or general waste had a negative opinion on waste management, specifically in Selly Oak. There are several requests; ‘wheelie bins’, ‘bin collections more regularly’, ‘recycling arrangements’, ‘regular street clean’, ‘less rubbish’ and ‘more info on recycling’. It appears that students are frustrated with fly tipping and building materials being left on the streets in Selly Oak and they want a general clean-up of the area.

*From August 2015, Wheeley bins will be wheeled out across Selly Oak, with recycling developments following on from then. The Community Wardens continue to be vigilant and report any significant fly tipping and waste in Selly Oak. The Guild will be once again running Junk Busters.*

Amenities

Most of the positive comments about amenities available are about services available to students in halls, focussing on location and proximity of shops and eating places. There are a few students who feel that Selly Oak needs a nice café and there are a few comments about shopping facilities being close by and convenient. In terms of transport available to students, there are a few complaints about trains not running on time from various stations around the University. There are also a few comments about ensuring that landlords and housing agencies are accountable and that rent prices in the area are too high, with one student commenting that they think ‘students are being ripped off in student housing’.

*The Guild remains focussed on tackling dodgy landlords and the VP Housing and Community is working to reform the Midlands Landlords accreditation scheme so that it recognises genuinely good landlord practices. Late Trains remain consistently a problem to all students but due to the quirks of the British Rail system it makes it very difficult to change this.*

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