

Evaluating the impact of the Unitu student feedback platform

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See this project presented by the researcher: <https://youtu.be/g0iYJVZOHbU>
If this project has informed your practice, let us know at lse.changemakers@lse.ac.uk

Introduction: What is Unitu

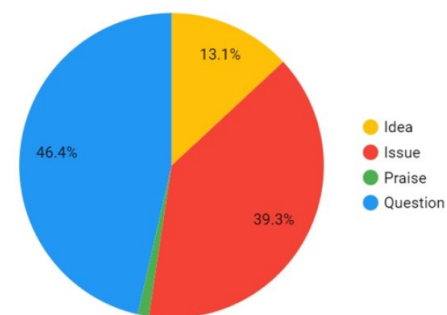
Unitu is a platform which allows students to ask questions directly to staff. Unitu can be thought of as similar to a Facebook page for each department, where students can post their questions, other students can upvote the questions, then further students can comment with their own addendums; finally, hopefully, a member of staff can comment and answer the questions.

We can see the appeal of Unitu through looking at the highest viewed questions asked. We notice instantly how mundane these questions are: Unitu is no revolutionary platform.

	CHANGE TITLE	BOARD	Creation date	VIEWS	VOTES
1	Grounds for appeals	LSE	Mar 21, 2021	974	108
2	Turnitin similarity report	Management	Nov 16, 2020	392	53
3	Exams, Timing and Proctoring Software	Law	Jan 11, 2021	334	41
4	Exact format / timing of summer assessments	Law	Jan 10, 2021	310	40
5	Law exam timetables	Law	Mar 16, 2021	374	36

There are four categories of question: Ideas, Issues, Praise and Questions. Questions ("is the Economics department doing hoodies this year?") usually find simple answers ("no").

In the following table we see some examples of changes that have been made as a response to Unitu. Unitu allows boring problems ("when will the roof terraces be open?") to receive solutions ("we will open them now"). Unitu is not revolutionary, but the LSE's endemic problems do not require revolutionary solutions. Rather, the solution is very simple: give people with problems a platform where they will be listened to.

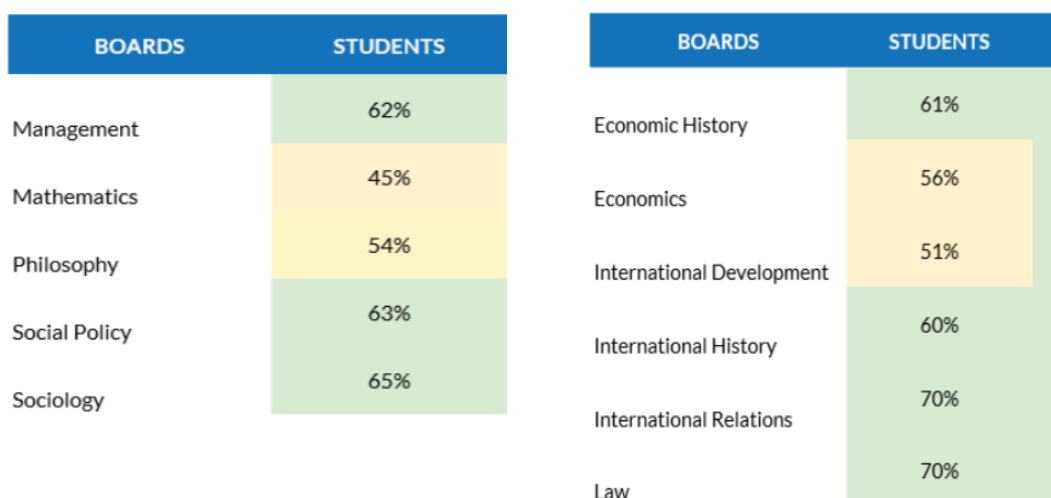


RESOLUTION DATE	CHANGE TITLE	BOARD	NSS CATEGORY
Feb 25, 2021	Roof terraces in Centre Building	LSE (Uni board)	Organisation and management
Mar 5, 2021	Zoom links on Moodle	LSE (Uni board)	Learning resources
Mar 18, 2021	Increased capacity, fewer queues	LSE (Uni board)	Learning resources

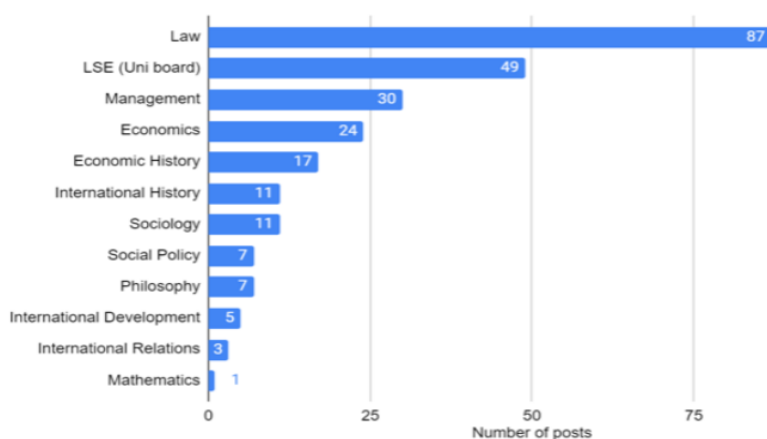
Unleashing the potential of Unitu

This final section of the proposal deals with the best policies the department can adopt for unleashing the potential of Unitu. I begin this section with two observations.

First, the level of signups and the level of posts varies massively between departments (as shown below). A department earnest in their desire to increase the engagement with Unitu should begin by discussing with other departments about what did and did not work. I interviewed members of staff from many departments hoping to provide scalable lessons, but I believe that there are still many insights which went untapped.



(Note, the graph below does not give percentages.)



Second, if a department has decided to adopt Unitu, it might as well do it properly. The service half-implemented is the worst of both worlds; on a platform students only occasionally use, response speeds are low and fatigue will set in.

Recommendations

There are two metrics by which I believe success should be judged: first, does a policy lead to more people signing up; second, does a policy lead to more people using the platform once signed up.

Policy Solution 1: Unify online spaces; establish Unitu as platform for ALL communication

Currently, departments use many different software for different things: communication with offer holders is performed over email, where their questions are answered in forums or occasionally zoom sessions; academic staff use Moodle, Canva or email for questions and answers; departments perform straw polls about how students are doing, using informal Google sheets, or asking people to email back. In each of these contexts actors within the department are asking students to engage, but each pulls the student in a different direction.

The proposed solution here is simple: establish Unitu as the platform for all communication. In any instance where a member of the department wants to either field questions or ask for feedback from a student, they should use Unitu. This hits both of our targets. More students sign up as they know this is the only way they can voice complaints or engage with professors. Second, it increases the number of people likely to comment. Commenting benefits from large snowball effects.

Policy Solution 2: At every chance, Unitu should be established as the norm

Here, we take an idea from the private sector: selling a product with a consistent message, at every chance available. First, the messaging around Unitu should be made consistent. When different people in the department are asked “what is Unitu?” they should give the same answer (“it’s where you go to get questions answered”).ⁱ Second, Unitu should be ‘sold’ at every stage: to offer holders, during welcome week, during weekly newsletters, as people sign up to Moodle forums, professors looking for feedback. In each of these instances, Unitu should appear: “if you have any questions, don’t hesitate to reach out at Unitu”.

Policy Solution 3: increasing department time on Unitu

Staff engagement on Unitu:

AVG TIME TO FIRST VIEW	AVG TIME TO FIRST REPLY	AVG TIME TO RESOLUTION	% POSTS WITH REPLY
2.07 Days	8.58 Days	16.44 Days	62%

Reps engagement on Unitu:

POSTS COMMENTED ON	POSTS CLOSED BY REPS	AVERAGE TIME TO RESPOND	AVERAGE TIME TO ESCALATE
25%	15%	1 day	8 days

We note here that these engagement numbers are low. Engagement from staff and reps is a chicken-and-egg problem; if engagement is low, fewer comments will be posted, so staff will spend less time on the site, and so forth. If the departments begin to roll out Unitu, they need to ensure that their monitoring of Unitu increases commensurate with the user base on Unitu.

ⁱ I would also recommend the departments discuss what their consistent message is to be. One administrator made the following comments, and it strikes me that they could be solved by a consistent message: "A key issue is fragmented responsibility. Some questions are academic ... and are very clearly in the remit of the ... Department. And other questions are more at the School level and not addressed by us e.g. why don't more buildings open during lockdown. Students don't often distinguish between School issues and Department issues and so direct all problems to the same place."