LEARNING FOR TOMORROW STUDENT CONSULTATION SUMMARY 2021

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Introduction

In late 2020, Curtin University drafted the Blended Learning model proposal. This document has undergone several updates since then and was recently relaunched as the Learning For Tomorrow (LFT) Strategy 2020-2022.

To ensure the student body was consulted throughout this process, the Curtin Student Guild conducted three consultation workshops and ran a survey to gather student feedback on the LFT Strategy 2020-2022. This summary presents the results of these feedback channels and provides indications of student expectations and needs going forward.

Part 1 - Consultation Workshops

Overview

Three student consultation workshops took place during Teaching Week 7 in Semester 1, 2021. An in-person session was held on Wednesday, 14th April and two online sessions took place on Tuesday, 13th April and Thursday, 15th April. Participants were shown each section of the Learning For Tomorrow Strategy presentation, given the opportunity to ask any questions, and invited to provide their feedback on the current strategy.

- 36 students registered attendance for the three workshops, with the breakdown according to Faculty as follows:
    - 40% Humanities
    - 20% Science and Engineering
    - 20% Health Sciences
    - 20% Business and Law

The main points raised by participants were:

- There was support for additional online resources but not as a replacement for in-person learning.
- Most students in attendance were in favour of keeping/retaining in-person lectures as a mode of learning.
- Students needed more information about the digital resources proposed to support learning, felt that the "podcasts, learning objects; video content and other digital objects" were not adequate replacements for lectures.
- Many mature age and postgraduate students strongly favoured online lecture delivery due to increased flexibility to balance career and family with studies.
- More support for online and regional students was welcomed.
- There was concern about the issue of recycled content.
- There was concern about internet connectivity, campus Wi-Fi and Curtin technology.
- Online study was identified as an accessibility issue for many students, especially those who identified with equity groups.
- There was confusion around the definition of a "contact hour".
- There were a range of opinions about the future of exams.
- Industry partnerships were welcomed but there were questions about the execution of such initiatives.
- Participants highlighted the importance of clear communication from the university during consultation processes.
- Students expressed feelings of frustration that feedback is not meaningfully incorporated in to improve upon their academic experiences.
- Participants raised their frustration at the lack of in-person learning in semester one (even though the Learning For Tomorrow strategy was not connected to COVID restrictions)

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Agile Learning Design

The flexibility outlined in this section was met extremely positively, particularly by mature aged and postgraduate students. Generally, there was some discussion about "connectedness" as alluded to in the first point within the section. Some students felt the word 'connectedness' did not represent their experience of increased online learning delivery. Others appreciated that provision of high-quality online options would promote/improve connectedness for remote students who would otherwise not be able to participate in study. Students recognised the varied perspectives towards online learning, and one person stated "This [online option] needs to be added, not substituted". Students asked for more information about micro-credentials, including their value and relevance to current students. Students were not familiar with micro-credentials and required more information to draw conclusions. The Learning Object Repository (LOR) was welcomed and there was a suggestion that it should be extended to include assessment resources where appropriate. Lastly, there was much discussion about internet connection and campus Wi-Fi issues. Students requested more information on the proposed digital resources to get a sense of what this could mean for their studies.

Blended Technologies

Students had an extensive discussion about education quality, with many feeling uncertain that an increased reliance on blended or hybrid technologies could deliver the same quality of learning they experienced face-to-face. Students expressed that they liked these concepts in theory, but they wanted additional digital resources to supplement in-person lectures, rather than substitute for them. Students felt that a range of options that provided students with choice would be optimal.

It was felt that learning unit material through online content could encourage less accountability, increased procrastination and a cramming approach to learning. Furthermore, students said that changes to learning delivery would be disruptive, particularly to those in the later stages of their courses. Participants expressed dissatisfaction at the prospect of continuing to pay the same tuition fees they were currently paying for a degree they entered into believing it would be delivered entirely in person.

Many participants noted accessibility issues during this section. Students with Autism and ADHD represented over half of the participants, across undergraduate, postgraduate and mature age demographics. These students indicated that concern about the accessibility implications of the proposed changes had been a motivator for attending the workshop. These students flagged that sensory, motivation, time management and attention issues would mean that increased reliance on online resources would disadvantage them. Students with accessibility needs felt that removing the option to learn content in-person would decrease access for those already struggling.

LFT overview schematic: Copied from Learning Tomorrow Strategy 2020-2022 consultation document.

<u>Differentiated Delivery</u>

While discussing the Differentiated Delivery section of the strategy, the phasing out of large-scale lectures was a particular point of contention for most students. Many stated that it was very important to them to maintain their choice of whether they received this content in-person or online. One student stated, "We should have the choice whether we learn 100% online, partially online and in-person, or 100% in-person".

It was understood that at this stage the strategy did not outline in detail what kind of activities might replace traditional lectures, but this lack of clarity was confusing. Many students expressed doubt about whether the content delivered via lectures could be adequately replaced by digital resources. This was a major sticking point for many students who said that while they were broadly in favour of the rest of the strategy, they could not accept the removal of large-scale lectures.

Groups who tended to be in favour of removing traditional lectures were postgraduate, mature age and online students. Many mature age and postgraduate students welcomed the flexibility provided by more online options as this allowed them to better balance their studies with their career and/or families. They said that students would need to take responsibility for their learning and be more self-directed. It was acknowledged that while this could be difficult for some students, this was an important skill to develop.

Online students mentioned that they would not be opposed to the removal of lectures because they felt that little effort is currently made to make lectures engaging for online students. There was discussion around using blended technologies to better engage online-only students with livestreams of lectures alongside in-person attendees. Students discussed ideas for how digital platforms and tools could bring online and in-person learning together, making it more interactive and engaging for all. Students were in favour making teaching more engaging and flexible through digital means.

There was much confusion about the definition of a contact hour - most participants defined it as face to face learning. Participants felt this area needed more specific information, asking questions like "No decrease in hours compared to what?". Participants desired a definition provided in the model for this point, as was done with 'authentic assessment design'.

Many questions were raised during this section (i.e.. "how would lectures be phased out?" "What is meant by large scale?"). Students felt that the wording was 'vague', used 'a lot of buzzwords' and seemed to be marketing the strategy. Students desired clearer information about what was being proposed. Overall students said that there were a lot of good ideas, but they needed clarity and the maintenance of students choice.

<u>Authentic Learning Outcomes</u>

There were mixed feelings about a reduction in exams. Well thought out substitutes had merit however it was noted that this was relevant in some degrees but not all. Students emphasised a desire for choice and variety. They said it was good to step away from standardised assessments as it was more in line with workplace expectations. However, students emphasised that this has got to be done the right way to ensure standards of assessment are not decreasing.

Students stressed that any alternatives should still thoroughly assess students understanding of the topic and expressed a fear of diminishing Curtin's reputation amongst industry. Students thought it was important to keep exams in areas where it was key that students memorise a lot of information, such as health sciences and other accredited areas.

One participant noted that the academic calendar was designed for full time students only. They did not feel it was suitable for working professionals trying to balance part-time postgrad work. Another student asked – "If exams are being phased out, what will happen to the dedicated exam weeks in the Academic Calendar? Is there opportunity to add another tuition free week?"

<u>Industry Engaged Learning Experiences</u>

Students were broadly in favour of having industry-engaged learning experiences. They acknowledged that this works for degrees like engineering but might not translate well to others. Students queried how this might work in degrees that don't link directly to industry or a career path. Students affirmed that these degrees were equally as important.

Industry partnerships can be a good idea, but how do they work? Participants thought it wise to research and find out how it was successfully carried out elsewhere. They wondered how the university determines what is job ready and how actively Curtin is connected to industries. How would this tie into industries that are obsolete or changing? For example, some students were concerned that by the time they finished studying, their degree would be obsolete or the industry would be diminishing.

Students valued having tutors with practical experience in industry, as well as courses with connections to industry. This was because they wanted to feel that the skills they were learning were up-to-date with industry practice.

<u>Students as Partners</u>

One of the main points raised when discussing this section of the model was concern around the way student consultation is carried out and how student feedback is considered and incorporated. Some participants expressed concern about how much weight student feedback would hold and how likely this process was to effect any real change on areas of the strategy they'd like to change.

Students expressed that Students as Partners seemed like a promising idea but that initiatives should be embedded in class time and made as accessible as possible to students. They said that students who were busy working or supporting family wouldn't have the time to get involved in extracurricular opportunities. It would mean that only the most motivated and engaged students would get involved, which wouldn't be a good representation of all the possible perspectives. One student suggested mandatory feedback for units, reflecting the Australian electoral system. Students mediated this by saying perhaps all students could be asked to give feedback and had to answer yes or no, so that the opportunity was brought to their attention. Another student reported that they had been filling out feedback surveys for years as a student but not seen any outcomes or felt listened to.

Many students also expressed concern that they had not been informed of these proposed changes by the university and only learnt of this model through word of mouth, communications from the Guild, or the media leak late last year. The lack of communication and transparency up until this point was disappointing for some participants, with some expressing that it felt somewhat intentional. It was discussed that the wording of the strategy sounded as though these changes had already been decided (i.e.. "as the new model is rolled out, large-scale lectures **will** be phased out").

While the ongoing reliance on online lectures was due to capacity restrictions during COVID-19, it was difficult for students who had been waiting for the return of in-person lectures to separate the two issues.

Part 2 - Survey

Overview

As it was acknowledged that many students would not be able to attend our set consultation workshops, the Guild drafted a brief survey to facilitate consultation. The survey showed students the Differentiated Delivery section of the Learning for Tomorrow Strategy and gathered their feedback and suggestions. This section was chosen as it had the highest degree of relevance to students learning experience. The survey also gathered student feedback on their current experience learning at Curtin, and expectations or suggestions on how it could be improved moving forward.
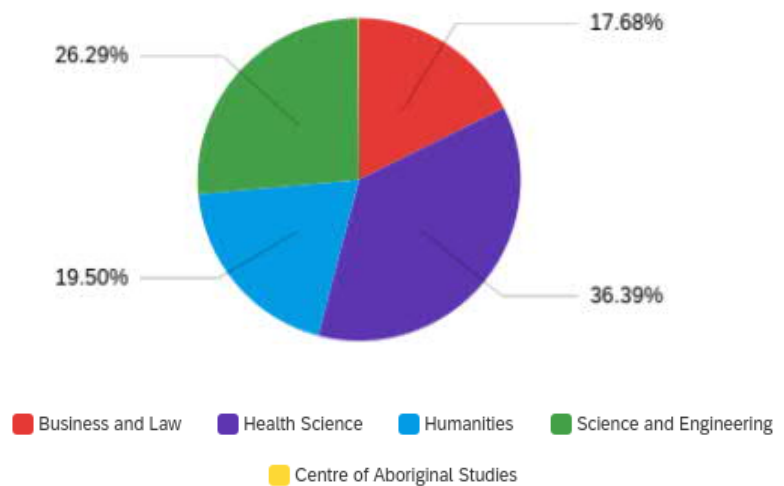
Summary of findings

- Respondents expressed preference for in-person learning citing high levels of satisfaction, engagement, accessibility and interaction.
- Most students supported the retention of in-person lectures.
- Students suggested improving lectures by making them shorter, more interactive and more engaging
- 82% of respondents said they would not be satisfied paying the same fees if more of their learning was delivered online
- 84% of respondents said they would spend less time on campus if there was an increase in online learning
- Most students gave Curtin's use of digital platforms and resources 3 or 4 stars out of 5

About the survey

At the time of compiling this report, 2085 total responses had been recorded.

- 84% of respondents were undergraduates and 16% post graduates

- 29% were first years, 26% second years, 20% third years, 9% fourth year or more,

- 10% masters, 3% HDR

- 1.5% Grad Diploma

- 1.3% Grad Certificate

Legend: Business and Law, Health Science, Humanities, Science and Engineering, Centre of Aboriginal Studies

Values: 17.68%, 36.39%, 19.50%, 26.29%

Legend: First Year, Second Year, Third Year, Fourth Year or more, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Masters, Higher Degree by Research (HDR)

Values: 29.24%, 26.07%, 20.07%, 8.83%, 1.39%, 1.49%, 10.03%, 2.88%
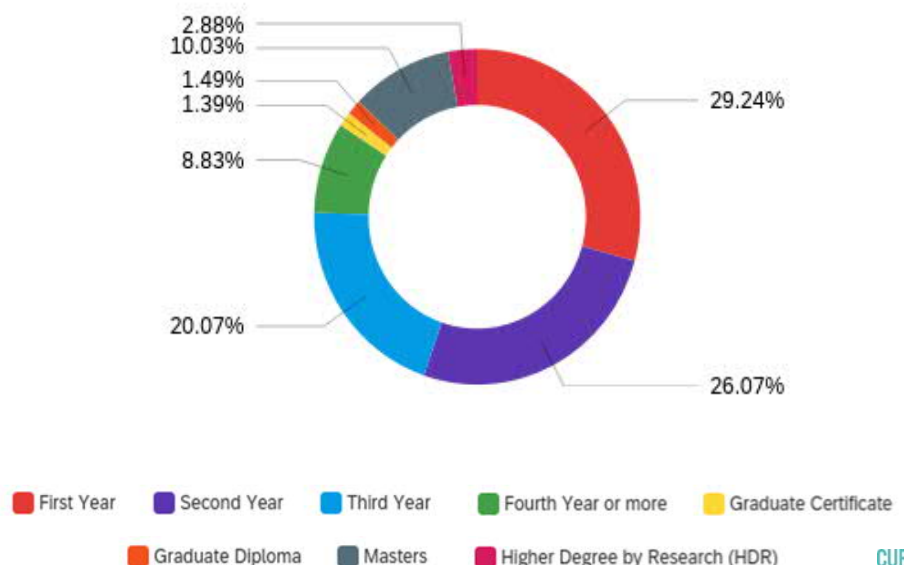
Students Current Learning Experience

Non lecture classes

The survey invited respondents to provide information about their current learning experiences. Survey respondents reported that 50% of their learning was being undertaken online (due to COVID restrictions), a situation with which they were not satisfied. Almost 70% of respondents did not feel connected to their university experience as a result of having to pivot to online lectures. Participants indicated their preference for in person learning identifying high levels of engagement, accessibility and interaction.

Respondents were asked to rate their overall experience with in-person classes (tutorials, seminars, labs etc.)

- 65% of respondents strongly agreed that they found their in person classes engaging
- 57% strongly agreed that they found in person classes accessible
- 71% strongly agreed that they could interact with others in the class
- 67% strongly agreed that they could ask questions or seek clarification

Q: Please rate your overall experience with in-person classes
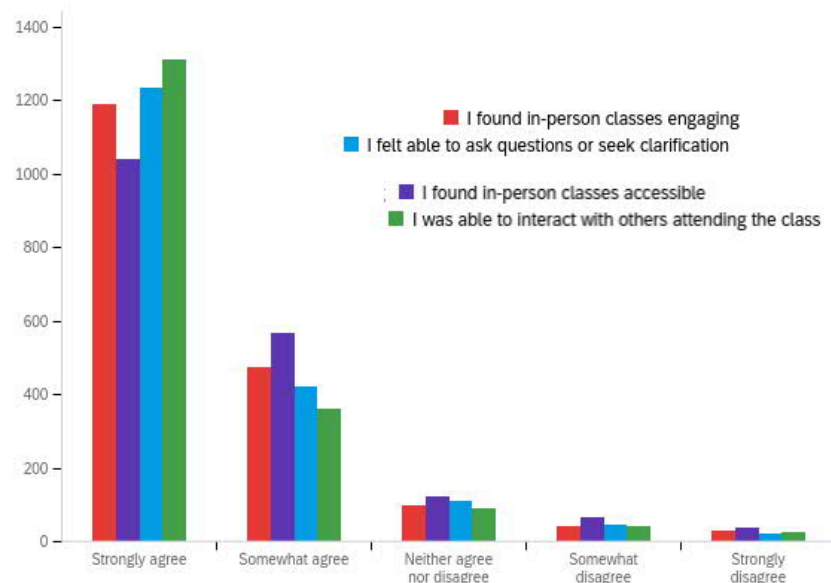
The survey asked students how they would improve Curtin's non-lecture classes (tutorials, workshops, seminars, labs, practicums). The main feedback was:

- Support for in-person learning with live streaming and online recordings as back-ups
- Smaller class sizes, content that is relevant to assignments, access to teachers, demonstration videos, working through tutorial answers were commonly cited
- Improved technology and better software

Lectures

Students were asked how they would improve Curtin's traditional lecture format. The following was noted:

- Keep in person lectures with access to live streaming and recorded lectures
- Need to improve opportunities to contact lecturers for clarification and feedback
- Adapt lectures to make them more engaging, interactive and shorter
- Do not continue to use recycled content
- Online platforms are not meeting student expectations
- Online lectures are not engaging or interactive and disconnect students from the university experience with their peers

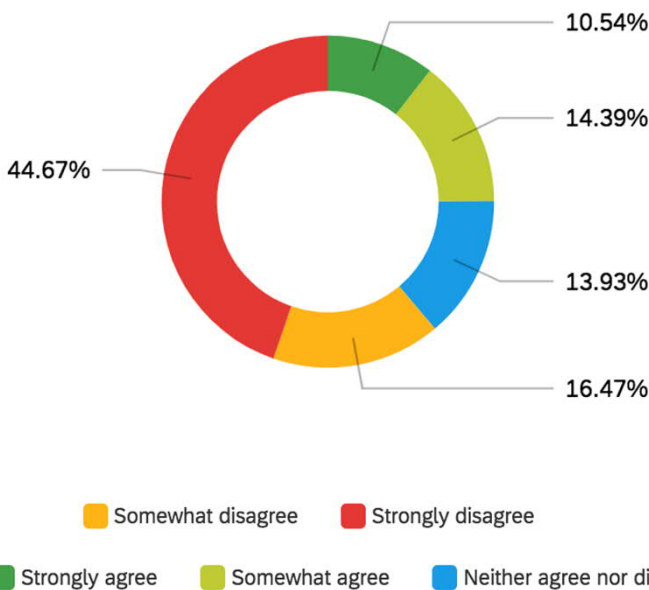# Students Current Learning Experience (Continued)

Prior to March 2020, 66% of survey respondents attended lectures always or most of the time.

46% strongly agreed that in person lectures were very engaging, 45% strongly agreed that in person lectures were accessible and 48% strongly agreed that in person lectures made it easy to ask questions or seek clarification.

8.70%
12.53%
33.92%
10.93%
33.92%

Never | Sometimes | About half the time
Most of the time | Always
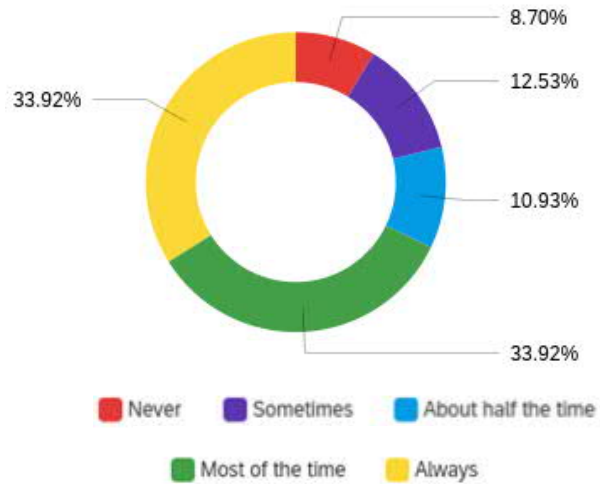
Q: How do you feel about the proposal to phase out in-person lecture content?

10.54%
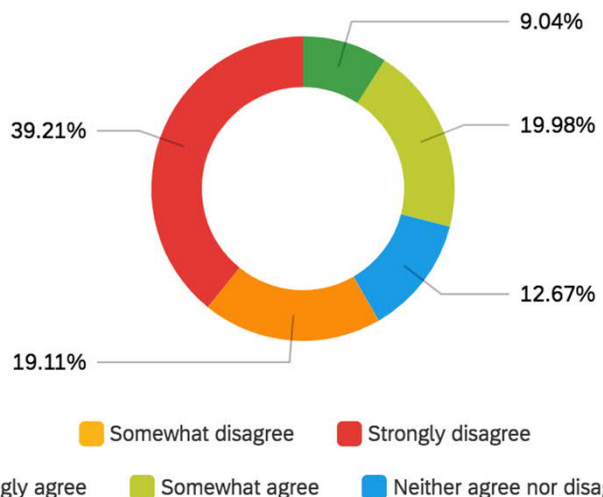14.39%
44.67%
13.93%
16.47%

The Learning for Tomorrow model foreshadows phasing out lectures but only 11% of respondents strongly agreed with this recommendation. 61% disagreed with the proposal to phase out lectures.

Students wanted to retain in-person lectures and were supportive of lectures being recorded and live-streamed. It appeared that lectures were considered a "foundation" element of learning.

Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree
Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree

Q: How do you feel about the proposal for traditional in-person lectures to be replaced by "podcasts, learning objects; video content and other digital objects"?

40% of respondents strongly disagreed and 19% somewhat disagreed with replacing traditional in-person lectures with "podcasts, learning objects; video content and other digital objects.

9.04%
19.98%
39.21%
12.67%
19.11%

Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree
Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree

Learning Preferences

As a result of COVID restrictions, students have had to pivot their studies online. Students were asked to estimate what percentage of their learning experience was currently online vs. in person.

The following definition was provided for online learning:
Online learning includes any learning supported by digital platforms like **Blackboard**, **Collaborate**, **Echo360**, etc. For example: lectures viewed online, online tests, online readings, Collaborate sessions, and use of the Discussion Board.

61% of students felt the proportion of their learning that is currently online was 50% or higher.

Students were then asked what estimated percentage of their learning experience they would prefer to be online vs in person.

The results indicate that students support a move towards more in person learning.
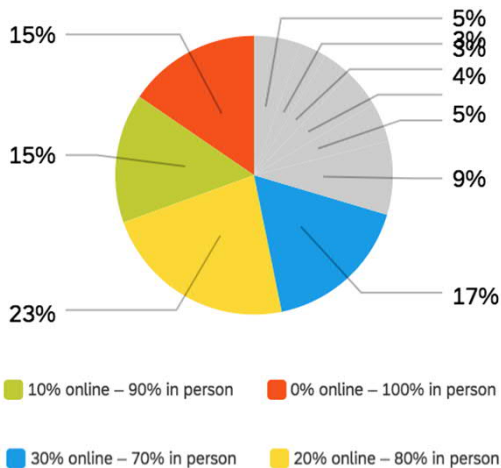
Q: What is the estimated percentage of your learning experience that is currently online vs in person?
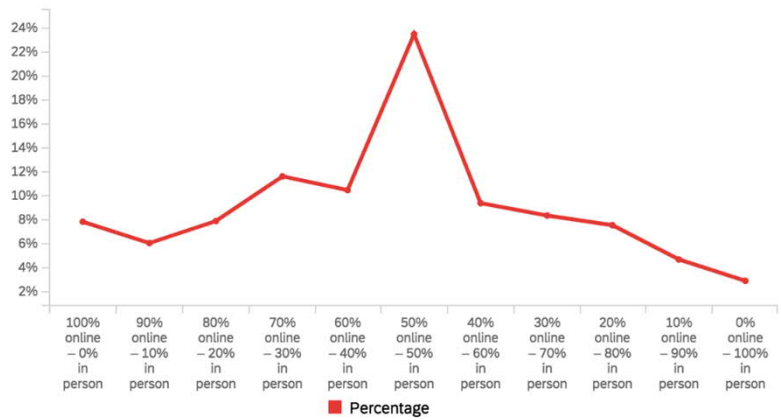
Q: What is the estimated percentage of your learning experience that you would **prefer** to be online vs in person?
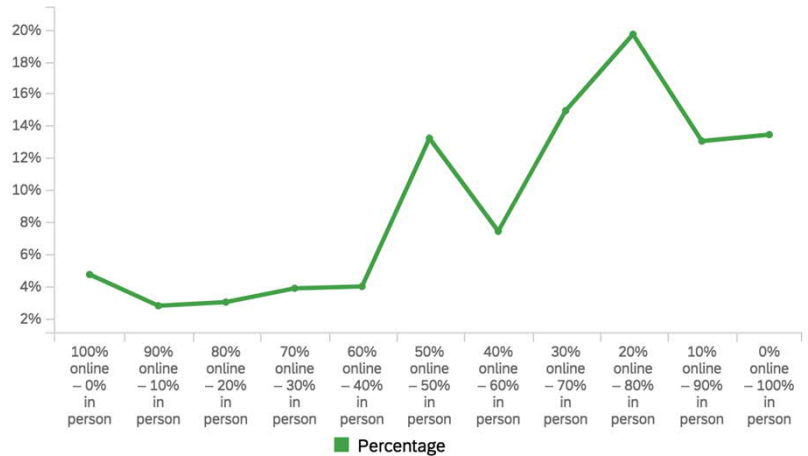
Q: What is the estimated percentage of your learning experience that you would **prefer** to be online vs in person?

70% of students indicated that they wanted their learning to be 70% in person or higher.
- 15% preferred 30% online – 70% in person
- 23% preferred 20% online – 80% in person
- 15% preferred 10% online – 90% in person
- 15% preferred 0% online – 100% in person

These results show that there is a strong demand for students to retain their ability to choose in person delivery for all parts of their learning experience, including material that is currently delivered in lecture form that the strategy proposes to transition to digital resources.

Learning Preferences (Continued)

Respondents were asked how satisfied they would be with paying the same fees if more of their learning was delivered online.

- 82% of respondents said they would not be satisfied paying the same fees
- 5% of respondents said they would be satisfied
- 13% were neutral

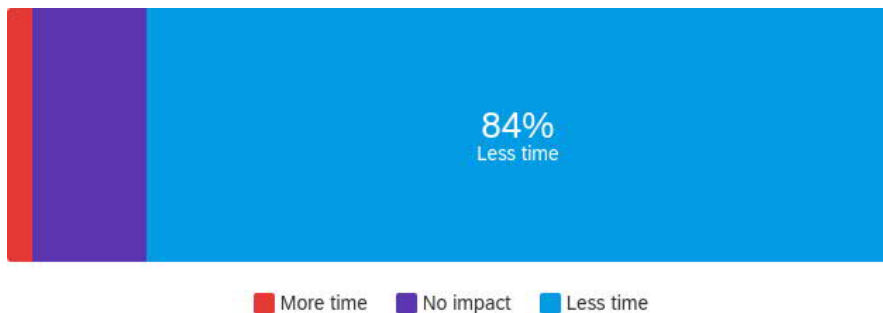Q: How satisfied would you be with paying the same fees if more of your learning was delivered online?

82%
Dissatisfied

■ Satisfied ■ Neutral ■ Dissatisfied
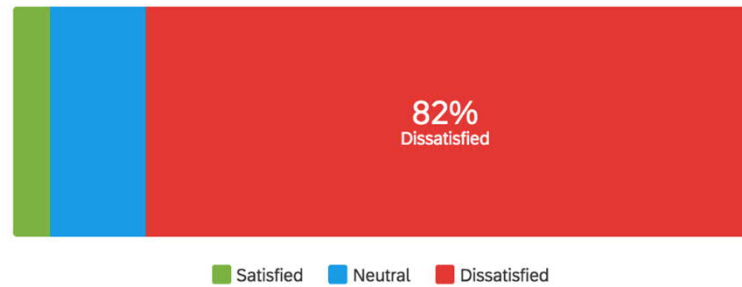
Preparedness for Employment: Students were not convinced enhanced online learning would increase their preparedness for employment with 69% of respondents believing it would not. Only 8% of respondents felt it would assist them.

Industry Collaboration: 43% of respondents strongly agreed and 34% somewhat agreed that Curtin University should increase collaborations with industry partners when designing university courses

Campus Experience: 84% of students said an increase in online learning would result in less time spent on campus with 13% saying it would have no impact and 3% indicating they would spend more time on campus.

Q: If there is an increase in online learning, how would this impact the amount of time you spend on campus?

84%
Less time

■ More time ■ No impact ■ Less time

Q: How do you prefer to access lecture content? (Please select as many as apply)

Students were asked to select their preferred channel to access lecture content and could select as many as applied.

Students first preference was in person lectures, following by online recordings of in person lectures, followed by multiple short videos, each explaining a few concepts.


■ Count
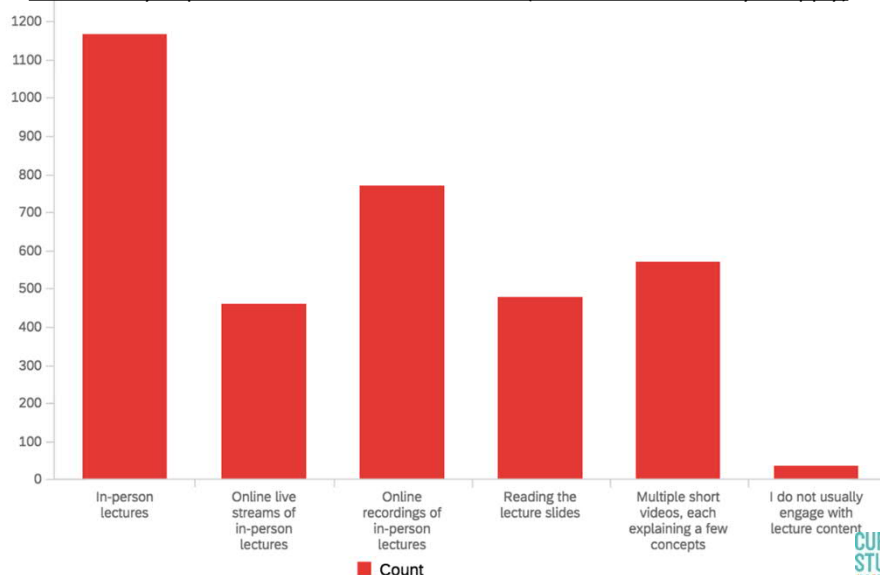
Technology and Resources

Some students appreciated the flexibility of working from home, however it was noted that the cost of setting up an appropriate home learning space could be exclusionary for some students making it a concern if this was a requirement to access learning.

Respondents said that access to campus labs and in-person lectures were important. Many reported that internet access and frequency was unreliable. Even if students had access to technology and could learn online there was a loss of social engagement by not coming to campus.

Most students rated the use of digital platforms and resources in their education at Curtin so far as 3 or 4 stars out of 5.

Q: How do you rate the use of digital platforms and resources in your education at Curtin so far?
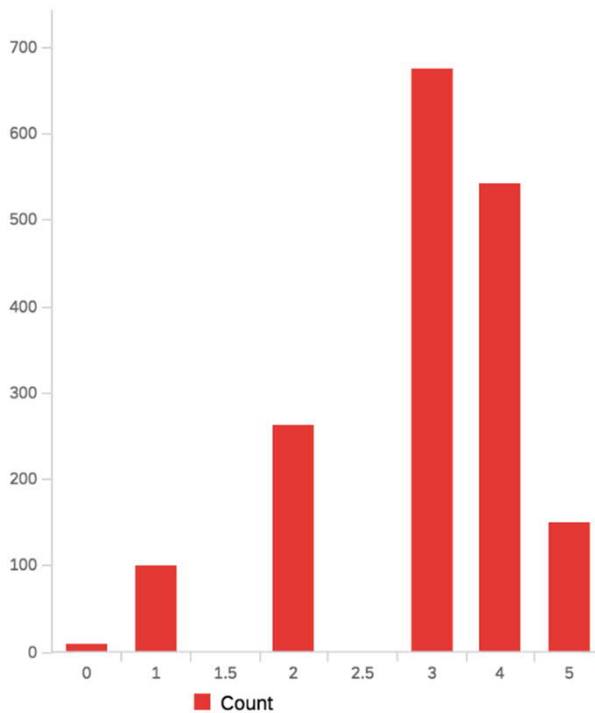
General Feedback

Students were able to submit general feedback to the proposed changes in a text box. The below summarises the main themes raised by students:

- A recurring issue raised by students was the lack of communication from the University around the proposed changes.

- While the ongoing restrictions on our current learning environment after the COVID-19 pandemic were not related to the model, many students expressed concerns about the current online-only lecture environment remaining permanent. Many were under the impression that in-person lectures would be returning in Semester 2, 2020 or Semester 1, 2021 and only found out that this would not be the case upon registering for classes.

- It was noted that the majority of the student body did not have the time, motivation or ability to dedicate to consulting on the changes outside of their usual study commitments, and that this could lead to the provision of feedback that only represented the most motivated and engaged students, rather than those who were likely to be most significantly affected by the model.

- Many students expressed the sentiment that universities were places where people should work together in class to solve problems, make friends and enhance their social skills. Online platforms did not allow this collaboration and reduced student engagement and enjoyment.

- In-person learning added a factor of accountability and allowed for growth of interpersonal skills which were highly important for students looking to enter the workforce.

- Many respondents vented their frustration at this semester's online environment because of COVID-19 and did not support any reduction in-person learning in the future.

- Some students were comfortable with more online content as it increased flexibility and provided access to some students who would not otherwise be able to study however it was noted that Curtin platforms especially Blackboard required adaptation.

- Students noted that this is not a one size fits all solution. Some courses required more hands-on learning than others

- Many respondents felt fees should be lowered if the model was to be adopted.

- Some students responded that online learning was a barrier to accessibility, particularly those with neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism or ADHD.

- There was concern that the model would put added pressure on an already reduced workforce and rather than attracting increased investment and staffing it would be a cost cutting measure which would ultimately reduce the quality of education.

Conclusion

The consultation found that students wanted priority on in-person learning as they believed it was important for accessibility, engagement, peer support, employability and university experience.

Lectures were an integral part of their education and considered to be a "foundation" learning block which students wanted to retain. That said, students indicated improvement was needed. They considered blended technology as an opportunity to make lectures more engaging and to support online students more effectively. Students wanted digital resources to support but not replace lectures.

We noted a large number of students with accessibility issues engaged with the consultation process and we acknowledge that the impact of change on equity groups is particularly significant.

Students had a clear preference for the ratio of in-person to online content and they will not be satisfied paying the same fees if less than 70% of learning is in person.

Recommendations

- Retain in-person lectures.
- Greater support for external students via improved learning resources and support and creating more interactive learning experiences.
- Increase in person learning.
- Maintain autonomy and choice for students with both in-person learning and online supporting resources.
- Improve lecture delivery to enhance engagement.
- More robust processes for student consultation with emphasis on bottom up collaboration.
- Strategy needs to improve accessibility for equity groups impacted by the changes.

- More detail required in the Differentiated Delivery section.