

TEF student submission – January 2023

Approach to evidence-gathering

overseeing the operation of the Students' Union's course representative system, an extensive network consisting of around 500 student volunteers. Course representatives are trained and supported on an ongoing basis by the Students' Union. The policy and advice (staff) team maintain regular contact with the course representatives. They also organise surveys, focus groups and other consultations with students. All these exercises contribute to an excellent understanding of the views and opinions of students across the University.

The Students' Union has had a system of paid school representatives in place since 2019.

liaises with course representatives to understand trends across the University. Past and present student officers and school representatives have been involved in preparing and commenting on this submission. Students' Union staff have supported with research, writing and editing.

We have held in-depth conversations with school representatives and course representatives. Course representatives have completed surveys and annual reports, they have contributed to course action logs, which have provided a sound research base for this submission.

The Students' Union has a broad range of research available from previous consultation exercises. They and the University regularly undertake surveys, focus groups and other exercises on a regular basis to ensure students' views are heard. We are very conscious of the need to use different methods to collect data to ensure a broad range of students' opinions are collected. For example, in the last year, data has been collected using large online surveys, short online surveys (1-3 short questions), in-person surveys, focus groups, informal conversations, and a review of all email queries to the reception and advice teams. The Students' Union has collated opinions from more than 3,000 identifiable students in three years, with more in anonymous activities.

Online research exercises have been advertised using a range of methods including Students' Union and University mailing lists, social media, intranet and flyers. We use anonymous surveys where we believe this will elicit a higher response rate and more detailed responses,

Most in-person surveys are undertaken by student officers, school representatives and Students' Union staff approaching students on campus. This is conducted on different days and times to capture the views of a wide range of students.

Exercises such as focus groups are widely advertised in advance. Some of our larger exercises have offered prizes as incentives for completion as experience has shown that it would be difficult to obtain a large number of responses otherwise. Where relevant, weightings and quotas are used to ensure responses reflect the makeup of the student body.

We have sought to continue to collate students' opinions through the usual means. However, we included additional questions in exercises such as focus groups with specific students which we believe would be relevant to this submission. We have undertaken several exercises specifically

for this submission. The first was a large qualitative survey which asked about students' views on relevant topics. The second was several focus groups with students from across the six schools.

In general, the University provides performance and outcome data to the Students' Union through the same committees and portals as University staff. University staff have provided additional data when requested to do so. Schools have also nominated students to broaden the range of opinions.

Where we have included direct quotes from students, they reflect general views on that point.

Relevant student population

We have not included any optional courses in this submission as it is currently impractical for us to collect information on the views of those students.

We have not written in detail about the demographics of our students as the University has covered this in its submission. However, we would like to highlight some points which are relevant to this submission:

- the large proportion of our students who are the first in their family to enter higher education – 52.7% of our students have parents who do not have a higher education qualification;
- 42% of students report their socio-economic backgrounds as having parents who either work in routine/manual occupations or who have never worked;
- 42.9% of students eligible for free school meals in previous education.

These numbers demonstrate the University's strong performance on widening access and participation.

This also has obvious implications for those students' knowledge and understanding of how higher education works and, as a result, they often have much greater support needs than other students.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Teaching, feedback and assessment practices supporting learning, progression, and attainment (SE1)

The University has continually improved its approach to assessment and feedback over recent years. The University is now in the top 29% (ranking) for improvement in the TEF metrics. Through the Students' Union, students have been engaged in this process, including detailed conversations to ensure they understood the implications of proposed changes.

The assessment and feedback policy has been amended to include alternative assessment as a matter of course, rather than requiring students to specifically request something for disability access or other reasons. Students are generally positive about the policy and happy with the timeliness of the feedback they receive. Where offered, they appreciate the skills they learn from formative assessments.

However, students want better application of the policy in some areas where this is inconsistent, especially on the quality of feedback. Those students want more detailed comments, for feedback to be more personalised, and for academics to offer helpful advice for future assessments. The University has invested in the MyFeedback system which provides additional pre-submission support for students. The University has included a strand on enhancing learning, teaching and assessment practices in its new learning, teaching and assessment strategy.

The University has improved its approach to extensions and extenuation in recent years, with changes usually agreed with the Students' Union. Many of our students have complex living arrangements with 65% working during term (sometimes full-time) and 57% having some form of family caring responsibilities. Although the approach to automatic extensions for most assessment deadlines (two per academic year) is relatively new, students cite it as a very helpful support which allows them to adapt to unplanned situations and to avoid overload from multiple assignment deadlines and other non-University responsibilities.

COVID pandemic

Students' experiences in the last three academic years have been impacted by the COVID pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, the Students' Union undertook a research project to understand what support students needed to continue their studies away from campus and prepared a report outlining suggestions on improvements which could be made to support students. Almost 500 students from across the University participated. This identified needs for laptops, financial support for broadband lines/dongles, and access to specialist software which had previously been accessed on campus.

The University's response was positive. Although devices were extremely difficult to source at that time, the University provided laptops and vouchers for broadband to hundreds of students during the first lockdown, between March and July 2020, which was essential to their continued learning. The University also made new software available (Amazon AppStream) to support students to access specialist software such as, for example, AutoCAD and Revit for architecture students. At that time, students were very complimentary of the University's efforts, allowing them to continue their studies as normally as possible during that very challenging time.

Disabled students

Disabled students say the University's disability and dyslexia team provides excellent support for most Disabled students, undertaking the required needs assessments. However, schools are required to implement the disability and dyslexia team's recommendations from those needs assessments, and inconsistencies of application sometimes arise at course or module level;

Disabled students attended focus groups and participated in surveys organised by the Students' Union. In an independent survey, when asked to comment on "I am doing as well as I want to be academically", 38% gave a negative response. This compares to a negative response rate of just 16% for students who did not declare a disability. For "The way my course is taught/assessed suits my learning style", 28% gave a negative response against 16% for students who did not declare a disability. the responses have been consistent across several years.

Supportive learning environment and accessing support (SE5)

Students are generally very positive about the support provided by the University, especially by academic staff. A qualitative survey of more than 350 students across all six schools and years showed that support from academic staff is one of the things that students value most highly in the University. For most students in this survey, this support is stated as the most important University contributor to their success in their studies; this was the case across all six schools.

"My lecturers are incredibly supportive and reliable"

"Lecturers and faculty leads are helpful and always there to support"

"The tutorial classes after each lecture are very good for students learning as they can put in practice what they learn on the lecture"

"My lecturers make it clear they are here to help, they do their most to make sure we are getting on well with our work and also check in to make sure we are doing well mentally"

"The teaching staff are very supportive"

In another survey (700 students), 76% of students said they feel comfortable approaching lecturers; . They also strongly agreed that staff understood their opinions even when they differed from their own

However, a significant minority of students (23%, 163 students) in that survey said lecturers take too long to reply to their queries. This feedback has been received in many exercises the Students' Union has undertaken. Students believe this is because staff do not have sufficient time in their working days to handle all the queries.

Students who access the central support services such as academic writing, maths and stats, etc. generally speak highly of it. In particular, the MyFeedback service which provides pre-submission advice on written assessments is highly valued by students.

"The staff are amazing but MyFeedback has been the biggest help for me."

The Students' Union organised focus groups as part of the University's successful mental health charter application, one of only universities to achieve this. These showed that students who access central support services are generally happy with the quality of the service provided. These focus groups also showed that students who were unfit to study received good support from the University during a study break,

Physical and virtual learning resources (SE6)

The University has made a lot of improvements to the physical and technical infrastructure of campuses in recent years. Student feedback on the academic teaching and learning areas which have been refurbished in recent years is almost exclusively positive. This is especially true of students in the school of business and law, school of health, sport and bioscience, and school of architecture, computing and engineering. We believe comments are more positive in these schools because this is where most investment has been to date, although there are plans to develop other facilities in the coming years.

"It has excellent study spaces, e.g. computer labs, and resources for revision and tutorial."

"Great facilities for architecture."

"There are outstanding practical facilities."

"The facilities are very modern."

100% of final-year students on one module (public law, LA5012) who undertook most of their teaching in the excellent new mock courtroom in the school of business and law, responded positively to the careers and overall satisfaction questions in their most recent module evaluation questionnaire.

"Coming into here getting to wear the wigs and the gowns, you truly learn how the dynamic of a courtroom works."

"It's the whole atmosphere of the courtroom. You get to see the professional part of it and you get to see what it looks like in real-life."

"I think this is also taking away the fear of going into the real court and we are getting familiar with the cultural facilities."

Similarly, 100% of first-year students on one module (financial markets and institutions, FN4008) who use the new industry-standard Bloomberg trading floor responded positively to the careers and overall satisfaction questions in their most recent module evaluation questionnaire.

"What we do with our degrees is all theoretical. With this [facility] we've got a chance to understand what the practical side is, and it is very beneficial."

Engaging with students, leading to improvements to experiences and outcomes (SE7)

Staff in many parts of the University are very receptive to course representatives and the views of students. Many course leaders meet regularly with course representatives. Course representatives reported that staff in many areas of the University are very receptive to them and their comments from their course mates. Those staff work hard to engage with students to ensure any issues are addressed in good time.

However, the appointment of course representatives is inconsistent and takes too long. This delays the training the Students' Union provides and means course reps are often unprepared for their roles until well into term. Discussion and resolution of initial teething difficulties which arise at the start of term is then also delayed. Course representatives report that they find this frustrating. This can affect some of the early course committee meetings, where issues arise which could have been resolved earlier. The Students' Union has recently agreed a joint improvement plan with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team to address these issues.

Some schools have started to organise large 'town hall' meetings and inviting all course representatives in the school (sometimes more than 100). This is to be commended as an attempt to engage with students.

The Students' Union has discussed this point with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team and will seek to improve the operations of the meetings.

Induction and orientation

The University has made positive changes to its induction and orientation programme over the last five years. Students are now provided with much more useful and detailed information, allowing them to make a better start to their university education.

The University has allocated more funding to this project, most notably appointing new staff to lead the introduction of a new evidence-informed approach to induction.

87% of new students stated in a University survey (n = 382) that they found their course induction sessions to be useful. The changes to orientation and induction have also seen an increase in attendance in some of these activities.

Academic advisers

Where students are assigned an adviser at the start of term and the adviser is proactive in meeting students, students appreciate it and, as with lecturers in general, feel it adds value to their courses. In surveys in 2019 (n = 370) and 2022 (n = 420), more than 60% of respondents said it was worthwhile and helped them with their studies.

However, there is inconsistency in the operation of the academic adviser system across the schools. Students in some areas complain about how long it takes to be assigned an adviser and many students remain unsure of the purpose of the academic advisers. In one Students' Union survey, 52% of students said they did not know what they were expected to do in a meeting with an academic adviser and would likely avoid it. In response, the University has provided more information for students in induction, in the course handbook and on the virtual learning environment.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Continuation and completion rates (SO2)

The University's performance in completion is exceptional for the period, recording the top performance of all universities for aggregate difference against benchmark for full-time students, i.e. 7.7 percentage points. This is two percentage points ahead of the next closest university. The University's performance for part-time students is 13.4 percentage points higher than the benchmark. The University's completion performance is significantly above benchmark in 99.3% of subject areas.

The University is also in the top 32% (ranking) for improvement among universities in the TEF metrics.w

Progression to skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes (SO3)

For progression to highly skilled employment, the University's individual year score (year 1 v year 3) improvement between 2017/18 and 2019/20 is ranked 12th nationally (from 118).

Supporting students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies (SO1) / Research in relevant disciplines, professional practice and/or employer engagement contributing to the student academic experience (SE3)

The University has a very clear focus on careers and supporting students to achieve their potential by providing them with them skills they need to secure an appropriate job in their chosen career. Students are aware of, and responsive to, this focus.

In a 2020 Students' Union survey, 61% of students said skills development was more important than getting a first- or upper second-class degree, with 27% saying they were equally important. This demonstrates that students understand the importance of learning skills beyond the specific subject academic content of their course.

In a large quantitative survey conducted by an external organisation (700+ responses), students in several schools spoke highly of the career focus in the curriculum and how lecturers include relevant content which enhances their learning.

"They demonstrate the concepts of the module in work scenarios so we learn."

"They have modules that cover most of the things that a dancer should know for their career."

"Our modules promote cross transferable skills."

Where it is offered on a regular basis, students are positive about employer engagement in curriculum-related activities and events. This includes talks or presentations by employers on campus or trips to relevant industry workplaces. Students in three schools (architecture, computing and engineering; arts and creative industries; business and law) spoke particularly highly of employment engagement and industries links.

"The department cooperates with people from outside the university, professionals who actively work in the industry. It's a great opportunity to see how the industry works."

"The school introduces its connections with different companies throughout the year, specific to an area I would like to work in."

"The course offers lots of chances to create connections within the industry."

"The provision of practical inclusive experiences and professional visits of cooperate bodies to the university to encourage students is very good."

Many students also referred to how they enjoyed and appreciated being taught by lecturers who had relevant industry experience and who could use those industry connections to support students' learning.

"Having people who worked in the industry as our teachers and having guest lecturers from industry is excellent."

Students have also commended the various employment and start-up schemes, including internships, hackathons and business competitions.

"The Back:ed scheme was a great way to support my dream and passion."

"The UEL funded internship scheme is good."

We have not undertaken specific research into students' views on how research and innovation are linked to the curriculum and their academic experience. However, students have said staff are well-informed about their subjects.

Students speak highly of the focus on careers in the curriculum, in co-curricular activities and in central support services. The CareerZone – both walk-in and online – provides comprehensive and tailored support for students to develop career skills. Students use the online services regularly, and engage with the walk-in spaces on campus to access immediate support.

"CareerZone provides a lot of opportunities for students whether it's a work based learning, work placement, internship, volunteering or paid work. It also provides help with CV, preparing for interviews and the skills needed. It provides a lot of opportunities for students to prepare them."

"The ease of using Career Pathway and finding internships to provide me with experience is good."

"I like having the option to use the 'My Competencies' section to check and plan for my professional skills improvement."

Almost 2,000 students accessed immediate one-to-one advice via walk-in in Career Zones across the three campuses. More than 3,500 pre-booked one-to-one career coaching appointments were held in the same period. Of those students who completed feedback forms after each a session, 100% of respondents said they found the sessions 'very useful'. Some stated that it had increased their confidence.

"The session was very helpful in terms of building up my confidence for job search and interviews."

"The professionalism and empathy displayed was assuring. My career coach was kind and resourceful and helpful. My confidence level has risen further."

There were complaints from students who said it was difficult to obtain an appointment with a careers advisor due to demand. They also felt there were insufficient numbers of placement coordinators to support the organisation of placements, and that there should be more placements available. Others said that although CareerZone was useful, it was not personalised enough, especially for relatively niche careers, e.g. visual arts.

some mature students may need additional and different career mentoring if the University is their route to transition to a different career or industry.

In the National Student Survey (2022), 78% of respondents agreed that 'as a result of my course I believe I have improved my career prospect', 81% agreed that 'the skills I have developed in higher education will be useful for my future career', 69% agreed that 'good advice is available for making career choices', and 74% agreed that 'my higher education experience has helped me plan for my future career'.

Students can attend a range of career-related events, including regular careers fairs.

The University provides free careers and enterprise support for all alumni for life, including unlimited access to the Career Zone platform, providing free professional development support mentoring, graduate jobs and internships, and a range of other supports. In the 2019/20 graduate outcomes survey, 85% of respondents agreed that 'my current activity is meaningful' and 71% agreed that 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity'.

Supporting students to achieve educational gains (SO5)

Students across the University say they highly value the mental wealth and professional fitness module which is now part of every level of every course, a part of the careers-focused approach which the University has adopted. Student satisfaction with this module is high, increasing to 88% in the latest module evaluation questionnaires (December 2022). The same percentage of students said that 'studying this module has given them the knowledge and skills required for their future

career'. This module has allowed students to develop careers skills, specific to their discipline, as part of the core curriculum.

"I am very content to be able to obtain the opportunity to learn the soft skills that will help me in my future career as well as in my personal life."

"The seminars are engaging and fun. We are doing interesting activities and games. The articles we are analysing are very useful from my point of view. Great experience."

"This module enhances my skills and I will use those skills in my future studies and career."

"I really enjoyed exploring the intelligences while connecting with my real-life experiences."

"In the course of enrolling on this module I have gained a wealth of knowledge and understanding of people in diverse with complex needs."

"I have felt extremely supported throughout this module and have benefited both personally and professionally by engaging with this module and the materials."