Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Student Submission

The Falmouth University TEF, student submission has been written by   , SU President Falmouth.   is an elected Sabbatical Officer/Union President at The Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union, hereafter referred to as 'The SU', representing Falmouth University students' academic interests; ensuring that students' views on their academic experience are listened to, fed-back and actioned by the University.   was elected on a mandate of facilitating opportunities to showcase portfolios, the ability to network with industry professionals and increasing access to relevant employability resources. The SU represents student members from both Falmouth University and The University of Exeter, Cornwall campuses. The Universities share a campus in Penryn and students share many non-teaching facilities including, commercial services, accommodation, wellbeing support services and academic support services such as libraries. This makes for a unique and diverse experience for all students who share space with others from very different backgrounds and pathways. Falmouth University also operates a campus in Falmouth where teaching only operates for Falmouth University programmes. Care has been taken throughout this submission to ensure that only the experiences of Falmouth students are represented. Support for this submission has come from members of The SU's Student Voice team, Student Voice Manager,   , and Student Voice Coordinator (Falmouth),   , who have provided support with gathering evidence from pre-existing sources and conducting research with the student body to obtain new evidence for the submission.

Evidence Sources

For this submission, we have drawn from several pre-existing evidence sources, both qualitative and quantitative. These include minutes from Student Staff Liaison Groups (SSLGs) dating back to academic year 2020/21. SSLGs are meetings that take place once a term between academic student representatives or reps and their course leaders. Minutes for these meetings are taken by Falmouth University administrative staff and hosted on the University's SharePoint site. These sources cover eight out of nine of the University departments (sometimes referred to as schools) between 2020 and 2022, with the exception being the Games Academy (GA), where minutes have not been consistently maintained. Despite this, the evidence gained from the SSLG minutes still represents a large proportion of Falmouth University students over a period of several years. We also understand that SSLG minutes reflect issues that are most prevalent to students at the time of writing; consequently, all critical comments were collected from the University's 'Live actions overview' system to focus on any outstanding complaints and avoid analysing any issues that may have since been resolved. Additionally, we have drawn on historic feedback from our Big Rep Meetings, which offer opportunities for reps to share feedback directly with University leadership and non-academic staff about all facets of student life. Reps are asked to gather feedback from their cohorts prior to the meeting to ensure that their feedback is representative. Evidence from these meetings dates back to academic year 2020/21. The most recent Big Rep Meeting on 30 November 2022 brought together 65 academic reps from all departments of Falmouth University. We also possess historic quantitative data collected from our 'Big SU Survey' dating back to 2019/20. This is a bi/triannual series of surveys open to all members of The SU, measuring general University satisfaction as well as

satisfaction with student voice, with various aspects of teaching, and the number of students who have considered discontinuing from their studies. This survey was administered by a third-party company until the academic year 2022/23.

In addition to these pre-existing evidence sources, we have undertaken further evidence gathering projects during the first study block of academic year 2022/23. This has included data gathering exercises both specific for TEF and routine. During the first study block of 22/23 The SU launched the Checkpoint Survey. This was conducted over two weeks of November 2022 and included questions designed to gather evidence for the TEF submission, with a specific focus on teaching quality, academic feedback among other aspects of academic provision. The content of this survey was informed by feedback received through the SSLG evidence, with the aim of obtaining further information and qualitative data on these topics. The Checkpoint survey was completed by 322 Falmouth University students, with a diverse but broadly representative sample from all departments and levels of study.

Finally, we held focus groups with Falmouth University Department Reps, (student representatives elected by students from all courses in their department). Participants were asked about how well student feedback had been listened to and actioned by their departments and what they were looking to gain from their time studying at Falmouth University, with the aim of determining the students' definition of education gains. These groups were attended by Department Reps from Games Academy (GA), School of Communication (SoC) and Fashion and Textile Institute (FTI). The questions were also sent out to reps via email, to which one Department Rep from the School of Architecture, Design, and Interiors (SADI) responded. As such the information obtained from these focus groups are not generalisable to the whole student population, however, it has provided us with an understanding of how students feel about this topic.

We have aimed to represent all of Falmouth University's undergraduate courses and departments within this submission. Some evidence gathering projects such as the focus groups have been primarily aimed at undergraduate courses whereas others, such as the Checkpoint Survey have received responses from students in other stages of study. As such, these experiences have also been drawn on for this submission but are not the primary focus.

Falmouth University have been willing and able to support with the creation of this submission. The Falmouth University TEF contact has held meetings to share knowledge for the submission, and The SU have been involved in the University's TEF working groups. Clear and easy access to all relevant data for the TEF Student Submission was also made available by Falmouth University. We also ensured we had a clear understanding of Falmouth University's definition of "Educational Gains" as this informed the way in which we would collect data from current students and the overall content of our submission.

Independence has been maintained during the creation of this submission. This submission has been driven by the trends in student feedback. Falmouth University has had no input into the content, or the way in which we have collected data for this submission. Falmouth University has not unduly influenced the TEF student submission.

Academic Experience and Assessment

Feedback from students regarding teaching staff and lecturers has been overwhelmingly positive. When asked in the Checkpoint survey 89% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their lecturers/tutors cared about their academic success. This was complimented by 84% of students agreeing with the statement "my lecturers / tutors care about my wellbeing". When asked to elaborate, respondents said:

> *'[Lecturers] have been very kind, helpful and patient as well as firm and guiding',*

> *'Course is great loving the content, the lecturers are helpful',*

> *'Everyone here, students and lecturers/staff alike made me feel at home and provided support in any way possible'.*

> *'The tutors are amazing, and you can tell they really care'*

> *'Everyone loves the teachers and the teaching. [Students] feel like the staff are all approachable and friendly and they have no issues with asking questions, they are always answered with an intelligent kind response. It makes for the best learning'*

Students from seven of the nine departments at Falmouth University also praised their teaching and academic support in SSLGs. Students from three of these departments emphasise that staff and academic support are 'inviting', 'always have time for me' and that it 'never felt like I was bothering them'. Six schools mentioned the personal tutor system being helpful in signposting for the right support services, four schools stating that they were 'very satisfied' with the ASK (academic support) service with students finding them 'easy to communicate with'.

When reviewing the feedback from SSLG minutes, a consistent point of praise among students across several departments was the high-level industry knowledge that teaching staff possess in the sector they teach. Additionally, from feedback obtained from our focus groups conducted with Department Reps, it became clear that a significant priority for Falmouth University students is gaining experience and knowledge of the industry they aspire to work in, to eventually find a job within those industries. Additionally, lecturer's experience within those industries is useful for fulfilling this goal. From the SSLG feedback, reps from four departments all praised their lecturer's industry knowledge/'experience in the field'. Examples include:

> *'Lecturers knowledge is valuable, engaging, and inspiring students for their future position in the industry. Guest lecturers are also appreciated.'*

> *'Lecturers are good at helping students find work experience ', and*
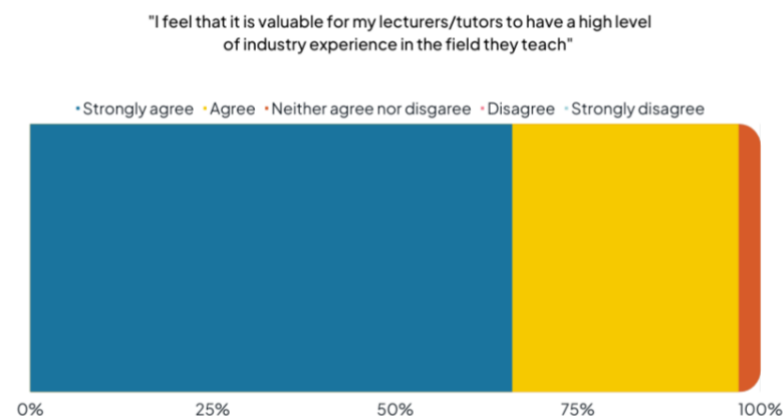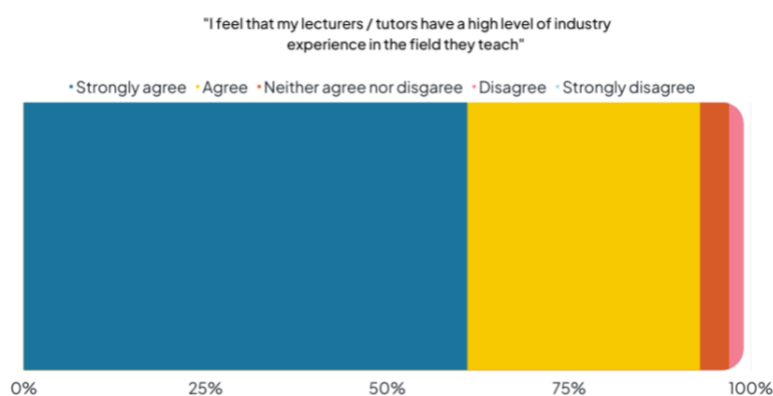
> *'Industry support through lecturers experience gives an idea of job roles they may be collaborating with when they go into the industry'.*

Due to this positive feedback to teaching staff, the following questions were included in the Checkpoint Survey: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?"

'I feel that my lecturers / tutors have a high level of industry experience in the field they teach'

'I feel that it is valuable for my lecturers/tutors to have a high level of industry experience in the field they teach'

The following graphs show the proportion of students who responded positively to each of these questions. From these responses we can see that this is clearly an aspect of Falmouth University's teaching that is valuable to students and that they appreciate.

"I feel that my lecturers / tutors have a high level of industry experience in the field they teach"

• Strongly agree • Agree • Neither agree nor disgaree • Disagree • Strongly disagree

"I feel that it is valuable for my lecturers/tutors to have a high level of industry experience in the field they teach"

• Strongly agree • Agree • Neither agree nor disgaree • Disagree • Strongly disagree

In addition to teaching staff, Technicians and technical staff were also discussed very positively in SSLGs, with technical support being described as "top-tier" by SoFT students. Students from AMATA also praised the technical staff as being:

'Brilliant at helping develop our courses confidence with the hardware and software',

IOP students also praised them as being 'really helpful and beneficial to students and helpful with workflow and motivation'.

'Technician made sure we all felt confident with our assessments and responded to all our emails'

Discussion among students about academic feedback is generally positive, with 78% of undergraduate students who responded to the survey answering that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of academic feedback. This figure remains consistently positive across all stages of undergraduate study, rising significantly among middle year undergraduate students to 87%. This is a significant improvement when compared to previous survey responses in previous years, with 71% positive responses in 2021/22 and 67% in 20/21. When asked to elaborate, students from seven departments spoke positively about academic feedback in SSLG's. Students mentioned that they find:

'1-2-1 contact and feedback useful and frequent, lecturers are easy to reach',

They like that 'Feedback Is personalised, tutors are helpful, and tutorials are informative. Lot of contact with teachers', and,

'Students like being able to choose which tutor they speak to, diversity of feedback given'.

With regards to assessment there has been historical evidence of a lack of clarity with assessment briefs. *'The more information about assessments the better so students aren't feeling anxious about the unknown assessment'* (Big Rep Meeting, 2021). Similar themes occur in our most recent SSLG data with concerns around assessment clarity being a common theme. Reps from four departments expressed concerns over assessment clarity in SSLG's.

'Some concerns over not being prepared for assessment. Time frame of some assessments makes students anxious'

'Some issue with clarity over assessments, when they are, how course content relates'.

Despite this, students have stated that they do feel supported whilst completing assessments. 77% of students responded positively to questions about the academic support they have received while completing assessments. This is broadly reflective of data provided by the OfS and NSS scores relating to assessment and feedback.

Overall, 81% of 322 students surveyed said they were satisfied, or extremely satisfied with their overall course learning experience this year. Comparatively, 80% of 267 students surveyed in 21/22, and 70% of 452 in 20/21.

Resources, support, and student engagement.

Rep feedback from the past three years suggests that there has been room for improvement with virtual learning resources and how they have supported teaching and learning. During Big Rep Meeting 20/21 and 21/22 students fed back that there were issues with virtual learning resources and how this supported them to adapt to learning during the pandemic.

'In the past the main issues that have been raised have been due to being online'

'It's difficult to have three different websites for booking stuff, confusion over booking technical resources can cause stress'

'Accessibility difference between laptop and mobile using the system'

'Students felt spoken at instead of spoken to online'.

However, there were also differences of opinion in these same spaces with students also feeding back that they felt there were benefits to the way in which online learning was delivered:

'Beneficial having so many resources online. Really accessible'

'Learning Space is a great tool, and it is really useful to have everything in one location'.

For some, this new style of learning proved to be beneficial, as a number of students felt teaching *'worked well for individual learning styles when it was live and recorded'*. Online workshops have also worked well; *'Online with purpose, for those that like the opportunity to learn at own pace'* (Big Rep Meeting, 2021). Feedback from SSLG minutes also demonstrates that students have

appreciated a blended learning approach because it gives them more flexibility in their studies and can make content more accessible for students. Course reps from Falmouth School of Art (FSA) and IoP mentioned that students appreciated having the option of joining sessions online or in-person and that *'student would appreciate a blended learning approach going forward'*. Reps from FSA, FTI and CBS all mentioned that the approach to online learning worked well, with content being well suited to the platforms used, and reps from FTI and AMATA believed that *'this way of working gives a good balance'.* Overall, however, reps in six departments mentioned feeling glad to be back in-person, with students having more of a sense of community on their courses, feeling more comfortable and confident participating in sessions and finding it easier to focus.

> *'Course is very good and in-person teaching is 'much more beneficial than the online lectures last year'*

> *'Students feel well supported and engaged. Last year was hard for us all and many people lost motivation with the course but are feeling refreshed and excited again!'*

Student Voice

The University engages with its students in many ways, including involvement of student representatives in key decision-making spaces throughout the institution. The University are receptive to the voice of students, listening in a way which leads to improvements of the experiences and outcomes of its students. Reps play an important role in the feedback process through SSLGs; forums for reps to deliver feedback about their experiences directly to course teams and be able to action and solve local issues effectively. Also, to be able to share what is going well on their courses and what they would like to see more of. These meetings happen once a term and are met with much positivity from both the reps and the University staff who attend. The student reps are an important resource and work with the sabbatical officer to bring academic feedback to the top-level conversations of the University, ensuring that the student voice is present in all decision making across the institution.

From the perspective of The SU, Falmouth University are consistently open to discussions and implementation of student feedback from all levels of student representation, both from The SU and the student body in general. Recent examples of this include:

The implementation of the 15-week study block, a change that was championed by the SU following students' feedback that having more time to complete assessment would improve some of the mental health and stress issues associated with their study.

The creation of the 'Cost of Learning' working group, lobbied for by The SU president after the student body fed back concerns around rising costs and how that will affect their ability to complete their studies.

Falmouth University is also engaging in conversations with student groups and elected leaders about the implementation of sustainability and the climate emergency within the curriculum. This has come as a direct result of lobbying and action from students who wished to be more involved in the curation

of their course content and assessment briefs regards to these issues that they are so passionate about.

When consulted on their experience of how student voice is listened to and actioned by the University, feedback from department reps was largely positive, with the majority of participants feeling that feedback delivered through the SSLG process *'gets actioned quickly and reliably and when things are raised, they are usually fixed'* . Participants also mentioned that they have been able to see their feedback put into action as changes to the course, with some claiming that their course had been partially or largely re-written due to rep feedback. Reps also feel that their role is valued by their departments staff '*value the feedback given and feel as though it is strong'.*

Falmouth University staff have historically engaged very well with The SU's Big Rep Meetings and are willing to facilitate conversations with students, giving them an alternative channel to share feedback on how their experience could be improved. The most recent Big Rep Meeting was attended by the Head of Employability, Head of Student Access and Success and The Vice-Chancellor of Falmouth University. Student reps, accompanied by sabbatical officers had the opportunity to feedback the experiences directly to the members of staff who can action this feedback.

Student Outcomes

This graph presents the proportion of respondents to the Checkpoint survey who have considered dropping out of University at any stage of their studies. Also presented is a clear picture of decline over time, of students considering dropping out of University. To gain some insight into the reasons for this change over time, we can examine wellbeing concerns which students have reported in the last three years of surveys and examine the correlation between those who

have reported strongly considering dropping out and those that have experienced issues with their wellbeing. The second graph demonstrates some of the most commonly cited wellbeing struggles by students who have strongly considered dropping out, from academic year 2019/20 to the current year. While stress and anxiety and depression are consistently within the top three reasons for discontinuation, '*Feeling my Uni experience has been impaired by the pandemic'* has also been a consistently cited reason for this group of students. This statistic has decreased over time as restrictions and lifestyle changes related to the pandemic have lessened. In general, when reaching

out for help from University Advice and Support services 42% of students surveyed believed they had received the help they needed, compared to 39% of students who went to a doctor. Students acknowledged that they feel the wellbeing services *'do the best they can with the high number of cases/the resources available'*. There is a recognition from students that the services are stretched thin, and they appreciate the quality of them despite the challenges.

Educational Gains

Falmouth University's working definition of educational gains is *'distance travelled in terms of knowledge and skill development'* which encompasses the *'authenticity of assessment for practice'* through live briefs and/or industry-linked projects, along with students' *'career readiness'*. When compared with the feedback we collected from department reps, it is clear this definition largely aligns with the ideas and aspirations of Falmouth University students. When asked in the Checkpoint Survey, if "Being able to find a job in my chosen field is the most important reason to attend University", 74% of students answered that they agreed or strongly agreed.

We also discussed the topic of educational gains with our department reps from GA, FTI, SADI, SoC (Graphics and Advertising) and SoC (Writing and Journalism), asking the question of what experience they intend to get out of their time at University. Whilst there was some disagreement over the importance of the final grade students received, all five department reps mentioned the importance of employability and industry experience as a key outcome to their studies. The department rep for GA explained that most students are *'looking for a good portfolio'* as the outcome of their degree; they choose to study with the GA at Falmouth because of the experience of working in the industry. Similarly, SoC's Writing and Journalism rep stated that *'most students are looking at experience in getting to know people from the industry and experiences of people who work in it'* and chose their courses as they gave students many opportunities to meet people in the industry such as authors and people in publishing. The department rep for FTI explained that, whilst getting a first-class degree was very important to a lot of FTI students, an emphasis on employability was also clear, with some courses within the department having a placement year, and students often receiving guest lectures from significant people working in the industry. It was also mentioned that FTI had a strong culture of collaboration across courses, including a module for all courses to work together. This focus on preparation for industry is also evident from feedback in SSLGs, with feedback like *'We are treated as if we are in the industry with some of our work. Positive because it is training us for industry'*.

As the students' idea of educational gains centres around employability and opportunities to gain practical skills, supporting them to find a job in their industry, we looked to investigate how Falmouth University has delivered on this from the students' perspective. In the Checkpoint survey 80% of students (259) agreed or strongly agreed that they have a good range of opportunities to develop skills that would help them find a job in their field of study. As well as this, when asked if students feel they have *'a good range of opportunities to build connections/network with people in my chosen field'* 73% responded positively. Finally, when asked if students *'feel that there is a large range of opportunities for employment within my chosen field after leaving University'* 59% responded positively.
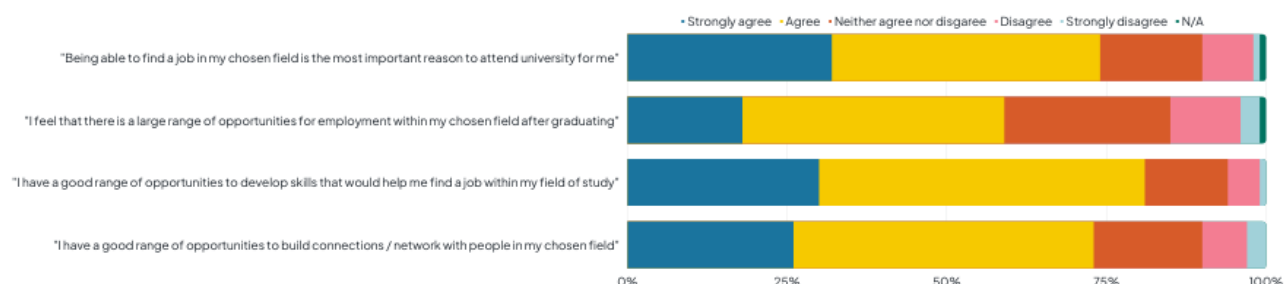
The following graphs presents student satisfaction with University employability services in total and by stage of study. In comparison to previous years' survey results, student satisfaction with the careers and employability service has risen over time, with 29% of students responding positively in 20/21 and 41% in 21/22.
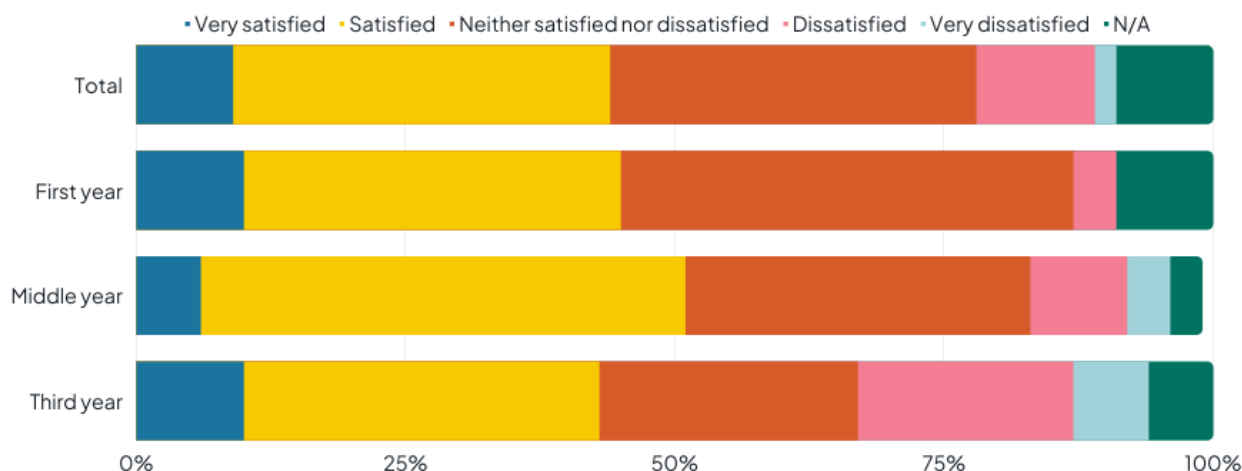
This is also the first time in the last three years of conducting these surveys where final year students have shown the least satisfaction in their career and employability opportunities. However, there is an understanding within the student body that this is largely to do with the negative impacts of the Covid19 pandemic.

> *'Students have not had a chance to build connections like they would have if covid had not happened. The grade is only thing they are going to get out of it as they had not had a chance to go on trips, get experience and network'.* (SoC Department Rep, finalyear student).

Feedback collected at this years' Big Rep Meeting also demonstrates Falmouth's definition of educational gains in action, as reps reported that they found live briefs useful, and appreciated that RealWork's micro-internship schemes encouraged industry diversity. However, these services are not always reaching students, as feedback from course reps in this years' Big Rep Meeting shows consensus on students not being aware of the employability schemes on offer. Two out of three groups at the Big Rep Meeting discussing employability stated that they had *'limited knowledge of RealWorks or Handshake'* and it was felt that better promotion of the resources was necessary.

Students felt that an earlier introduction to these services through compulsory timetabled sessions would be beneficial. However, it is understood that students largely do not engage with employability services until they know that they are ready to. This would explain the proportion of first and middle-year students who have expressed being *'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with services'* compared to the response from final year students. It is worth remembering that Falmouth University is consistently working to grow and improve these services and the University's Head of Employability engages consistently with SU President Falmouth and other student representatives through initiatives such as the Big Rep Meeting to ensure that student experience and feedback is taken into account in the discussions of employability.

Conclusion

Overall, Falmouth University students repeatedly express that their time studying at the institution is positive and consistently talk about their University and the unique experience it offers both inside and outside the classroom with fondness and passion.

> *'Overall, I have loved Falmouth University and would highly recommend it to anybody.'*

The ethos of teaching and learning that Falmouth University has implemented across all its courses, *'distance travelled in terms of knowledge and skill development'*, *'authenticity of assessment and practice'* and *'career readiness'*, has resonated with students across the huge variety of disciplines on offer. This philosophy of teaching and learning not only supports students to feel prepared and enthusiastic for the work in creative industries, but also to broaden their horizons and gain a greater understanding of what opportunities are open to them.

> *'[Students] have discovered paths that they didn't know existed prior'.*

While there is always room for improvement in certain aspects of student experience, there is an appreciation among Falmouth students for all that Falmouth University does in supporting them in their studies, career aspirations and their personal wellbeing.

> *'I love everything about this University and the course I am on. I really feel like I am seen, and I belong to something important'*

Most consistent of all feedback is the high quality of teaching and the experience, knowledge and compassion of teaching staff and all other student facing staff. At all levels of everyday contact, students feel respected, understood, and listened to, resulting in an environment that feels a welcoming, supportive, and comfortable place to learn and excel in the subjects that they are so passionate about.

> *'Keep up the wonderful teaching, I've never enjoyed learning art so much. Thank you.'*