

Introduction and Overview

The Union values its strong working relationship with Manchester Met and the positive impact that this has on its students. The Union's elected officers and key staff members are embedded into the University's voice and governance system. Student business is the first non-administrative agenda item in all meetings. The Union has representation in all meetings we can accommodate within the governance cycle including Board of Governors as well as attending many project, working and task and finish groups. An elected officer sits on almost all disciplinary committees and on University Education Annual Reviews (EARs.) EARs are detailed department level scrutiny and action planning mechanisms. Finally, the Students' Union leadership team meet with the University Executive Group termly to ensure open dialogue. The Union attends well over 60 different sets of meeting where it is invited to influence University thinking and decision making. The Union never has to seek inclusion as Manchester Met always reaches out.

This submission has been independently produced by The Union, with the University supporting its production through access to data, documentation drafts and meetings with key staff members, particularly the PVC for Education. The Union was invited to and attended the University's TEF working group where the University kept us informed on their progress and offered support within the confines of the guidance. This submission also refers back to the university's submission where useful, this is indicated by numbers in brackets. The Union agree with the University's TEF submission as a valid and fair reflection of its operation.

Student voice within the independent submission

The Union's approach to this submission was driven by data from a variety of sources. NSS results and the TEF dashboard were used to identify areas for further exploration. In Summer 2022, the Union commissioned Alterline to conduct a survey with students (n=1,715 UG) as well as an analysis of NSS data over the four year submission period. The Union's Education Officer, as the student contact for the submission, used this data and that from existing sources, including the induction surveys (2023, n=1131 Level 4 UG), Union Advice Centre trends and statistics, NSS action plans, differential outcomes data and EARs, to shape the approach we have taken within this submission. Where referenced, The Union's internal survey data includes all subject areas and a broad range of student characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, commuter status, fee status, parent/carers responsibilities and disability.

Throughout the TEF timeline, we have also engaged with student communities including our BAME Ambassadors, society committee members and course reps. The Union facilitated two focus groups, one online and one in person and Alterline facilitated an online community. The insights gained from these discussions have helped shape this submission.

Whilst this student submission focuses predominantly on the experience of current students and students in the 2021/22 academic year, it would be remiss to not mention the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the student experience. All the areas touched upon in this submission were, to varying extents, impacted by the pandemic. Manchester Met's NSS scores were on a positive trajectory until the pandemic induced sector dip. Manchester Met's overall performance in the NSS 2022 has seen one of the best recoveries for any institution with above sector performances in 7 of the 9 areas and significantly closing the gaps in the other two. Institutional EARs allow the University to robustly identify areas of strength and areas for development within departments and courses,

Provider name: Manchester Metropolitan University

allowing timely actions to happen. EARs will be referred to throughout this submission to highlight the institutional approach to quality assurance and making prompt and appropriate interventions where necessary.

EARs assess whether institutional objectives are being met across departments and programmes (2.6). Each department has its own EAR meeting which is chaired by the PVC Education. Union officers have been full members of these panel meetings since they were established five years ago, ensuring that student voice is reflected upon within the meetings. The Union strongly believes that EARs are an effective and valuable mechanism for holding departments to account and scrutinising performance based on a broad range of datasets. Some of the areas covered within EARs are areas that the University is particularly focusing on, such as differential student outcomes, so it is welcome that this is reviewed within EARs as well, ensuring that departments are making progress and if not, identifying support and actions that may be needed. Actions are identified at a local level within EARs and are then monitored at both university and faculty level.

University Strategy

Manchester Met lays out its values within its Road to 2030 Core Strategy: Education 2022-2026 (1.1 and 1.4). The Union was actively involved in the creation of this strategy. The values are demonstrated throughout students' time here at Manchester Met and are reflected throughout all aspects covered here. These values are also reflected within the University's educational gains definition and the key thread within the University's submission. The values are:

- We are student centred
- We are people led
- We are future focused
- We are inclusive
- We are Manchester Met proud

The institution's definition of educational gains can be seen throughout this submission as to how it approaches and defines academic development, personal development and work readiness. Manchester Met's submission also rightly highlights the civic mission of the University and how the student demographic at Manchester Met reflects its mission as a widening participation (WP) institution (1.3). The Union will also reflect on this mission within this submission.

Student experience

The teaching on my course

Manchester Met's teaching is in line with the TEF benchmark and in NSS 2022, whilst one of only two thematic areas that was not above sector, the university had closed the gap significantly for the first time in the 4-year TEF reporting period. We believe it is important to highlight that the performance is strong having almost matched the sector position making significant gains. Students believe Manchester Met 'challenges them to achieve their best work', with Manchester Met being above the benchmark in NSS 2022. Results from The Union's Alterline 2022 survey shows that 79% of students are satisfied by the intellectual challenge of academic life. Out of satisfaction with twelve aspects of academic life covered in this survey, this was the second highest scoring area followed by 77% being 'satisfied with the teaching on my course' and 78% satisfied with 'course content'. We

Provider name: Manchester Metropolitan University

were particularly pleased that the university were swift to return to face-to-face teaching post pandemic. This was in response to students expressed preferences as articulated by The Union.

Assessment and Feedback

Manchester Met has been a consistently strong performer in this area of the NSS compared to sector throughout the TEF period. Both the NSS and Alterline data suggest that an even stronger performance could be achieved through action plans focusing on the usefulness of comments on students' work. The Union recognises this is a complex issue with many factors including class size, individual teaching styles and academic discipline demanding localised approaches. As part of our preparation for this submission, The Union conducted an online community with students around assessment and feedback to understand more about students' experiences. These discussions further evidenced how important it is that students receive effective feedback which enables them to develop and improve their work.

The University is committed to continual development in this area, despite the already strong performance. In consultation with the Education Officer, Manchester Met has prepared a paper to take to Education Committee that will set up an assessment and feedback project group. We look forward to working with them on this important piece of work and seeing the positive impact that it has for students.

Differential outcomes – BAME Ambassador case study

The sector has been addressing the awarding gaps within racial characteristic and POLAR quintile for several years. Manchester Met has amongst the highest proportions and numbers of BAME and WP students in the UK. The University is taking a holistic approach to eliminating the awarding gaps. Manchester Met has set itself significant targets to reduce the awarding gaps to below 10% within the next two years. During the TEF period the University achieved early success in eliminating the gaps but has seen a reversal post pandemic.

The University was successful in its application for the AdvanceHE Race Equity Charter, it is one of the few universities to identify that academic misconduct is disproportionately affecting BAME students and is working with The Union to address it.

The BAME Ambassador Project (part of the Inclusive Learning Communities project) is coordinated and led by a dedicated union staff member and a partnership between The Union and Manchester Met (2.4.1 case study). BAME Ambassadors have led on the Big Change Project, an award-winning project funded by the University. Student Ambassadors coach and interview departments, using a select committee approach, to work towards reducing the awarding gap. University leaders are trained to have confidence in having race sensitive conversations by an external specialist agency. Manchester Met has recently confirmed that they will be continuing to fund the BAME Ambassador Project.

Local initiatives have been successfully undertaken to reduce the BAME awarding gap. One participating department from the Big Change Project, the Department of Social Care and Social Work, collaborated with students, staff and ILC to produce an anti-racism guide and a decolonised curriculum (with work in other areas also), resulting in a 26% reduction in the white-BAME awarding gap. We have confidence this best practice can be replicated.

Manchester Met discusses the use of a diverse range of assessment methods to support students' learning. Assessment methods changed as a result of COVID, with many previously closed book exams, moving towards an open book and online exam as well as multiple choice questions. The use of authentic assessments (2.1.2) and work-integrated learning (2.2.1) by Manchester Met better equips students for life after graduation.

Academic Support

Like all universities, a key source of academic support for students is their personal tutors. In the 2022 NSS, Manchester Met asked how useful students found their personal tutor meetings. 66.1% of respondents agreed that their personal tutor meetings were useful. These results place Manchester Met above the sector average which again highlights the high-quality provision at Manchester Met.

Personal tutoring at Manchester Met follows the three main areas identified in Office for Students regulations; course, community and career, as seen in Manchester Met's personal tutoring policy. These three areas are integral to students thriving at university and beyond. The Union strongly supports the institution's inclusion of these areas into the policy as we recognise how much these areas impact upon both the student experience and their outcomes. The NSS results are positive and above the sector average, and there is ongoing work to address why a third of students feel their meetings with personal tutors could have been more useful. Manchester Met recognises that more work needs to be done to strengthen the personal tutor system and The Union is supportive of this as it will ensure that Manchester Met continues to be sector leading in this area (2.3.1) and delivering towards the definition of educational gains. This is reflected in Manchester Met's new education strategy:

"Enhancing our personal tutoring system to ensure more consistent delivery, better connection between support services, and stronger orientation from pre-entry to graduation."

As personal tutoring is a recognised key source of academic support, The Union wanted to further explore students' experiences of personal tutoring in addition to the metrics. The Union conducted a focus group with students to understand more about their experiences. To better understand students' expectations, we asked students 'what do you think a personal tutor is for?'. Almost all students identified purposes of a personal tutor that fit within the three OfS areas identified above, showing that in most cases, students know the purpose of the system and the support it can provide. All who attended the focus group reported that they felt supported by their personal tutor.

Analysing students' views on personal tutoring and their usefulness and POLAR4 data provides some interesting insights. Students in POLAR4 quintiles 1 and 5 are more likely to find their personal tutor meetings useful with those in POLAR4 quintiles 2, 3 and 4 less likely to find them useful. The fact that POLAR4 quintile 1 students are more likely to find their personal tutor meetings useful demonstrates Manchester Met's commitment to supporting first generation students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Work should be done to ensure that POLAR4 quintile 2, 3 and 4 students also find it useful.

The Union's annual induction survey also tracks level 4 UG students' experiences of meeting their personal tutors and academic support. We have seen year-on-year increases since Covid in

positive ratings of respondents' experience of "meeting my personal tutor and the key unit/course leaders" (79.3% in 2022) and "having any queries about my studies answered promptly and fully by academic staff" (76.3% in 2022) highlighting that academic support as experienced by students and practiced by departments or programmes may extend beyond the personal tutor question alone. This aligns with NSS data where satisfaction relating to academic support has a strong correlation with overall satisfaction. In particular, "receiving sufficient guidance and advice in relation to the course" (74.8% in 2022) is one of the specific NSS questions (in the academic support scale) which has a high correlation to overall satisfaction.

The University has an integrated and holistic approach to supporting new students through the transition into higher education through its welcome and induction programme. The Union has conducted an annual induction survey to track students' experience of this for many years. Since 2020/21, in partnership with the University, the Union asks students who say they are considering leaving, deferring or transferring if they would like to be contacted by the University for further advice and then facilitate contact by the Student Engagement Team at the University. The Students' Union does not have definitive data as to the outcomes of this intervention, however it shows the positive partnership and the appetite of the university to identify students who may be vulnerable or at risk of withdrawal and need support but are unable to reach out (2.3.1).

Since 2020/21 we have asked whether students' experience exceeded, met or fell short of their expectations, this is similar to a question asked in the Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES) run by Advance HE and HEPI (n=10,142). Our data compares favourably to their 2022 data for first year students (captured in March) with 23% of our induction survey respondents agreeing that their university experience to date had exceeded expectations vs 20% of SAES respondents agreeing that their experience had been better than expected. Both survey results were in line for levels of students claiming that their experience was "worse than expected" (SAES – 12%) and "fell short of expectations" (induction survey – 12%).

Personal tutoring as a system is decades old and is not always scalable. Recognising this, Manchester Met developed other sophisticated forms of support that provide similar outcomes to personal tutoring. My5YP (which was developed in partnership with the Students' Union), is one of those mechanisms, as is the Peer Assisted Learning (PALs) scheme. The University has significantly invested in PALs as highlighted in 2.4.1 of their submission. It is important to note investment in University mental health professional roles and the importance of technicians.

Learning Resources

Learning resources, both physical spaces and resources provided in person or online, are incredibly important to student experience and outcomes. Without learning resources supporting students' learning, their experience is limited, and their outcomes impacted. Therefore, it is great to see that students have a positive experience of the learning resources available to them, as demonstrated by data from Alterline's survey that shows that 86% of students are satisfied or very satisfied with the library resources, with only 3% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. IT resources in the same survey shows 77% of students being satisfied or very satisfied with the IT resources available, with only 6% being very dissatisfied or dissatisfied.

The University introduced the getting ready to learn Moodle resources in 2021. Approximately half of undergraduate students surveyed in the most recent induction survey had used the getting ready

to learn resource and an overwhelming majority (92%) found it very or fairly useful. This trend has been consistent over the last three years since the resource was introduced. Previous analysis indicated a positive relationship between those who used and found the resource useful and their overall satisfaction with academic induction.

With the move to remote learning and online teaching as a result of COVID, not all students were in the same position to continue engaging in their learning. The impact of the pandemic can be seen with a notable dip in student satisfaction with learning resources in the 2021 NSS results with the results recovering for 2022. Manchester Met worked to reduce the disadvantages of the digital divide and digital poverty by introducing a laptop loan service, which allows students to borrow a laptop from 24 hours to seven days (2.5.2 Case Study). The impact of digital poverty is recognised within the Faculty of Business and Law's 2021/22 EAR Report, demonstrating that Manchester Met recognises and addresses the individual needs of their students.

Manchester Met continually reviews the resources and spaces that students can access during their degrees. This stems from the values within its education strategy of being student centred, inclusive and future focused, meeting the University's definition of educational gains. An increasing number of study spaces are being developed for students, with a 27% increase in spaces since 2019 (2.5.1). It is further reflected within the library transformation project. This project is set to significantly develop and enhance the library space available to Manchester Met students, providing future students with incredible resources and opportunities to learn. The new library will create 2,000 study spaces. In addition to investing in learning spaces, Manchester Met is also investing in students' access to electronic resources. This is seen by an increase in spending on e-books and e-journals that has continued beyond COVID, with overall spending on digital resources reaching over £3.3 million in 2021/22 (2.5.2).

With Manchester Met offering one of the most comprehensive selections of degree programmes in the sector (1.2), many specialised learning resources are required to support students in their learning (2.1.1). For students undertaking degrees within the Faculty of Health and Education, specialised and interactive simulation suites are available. These include a flat that can be set up for a number of scenarios for social workers, interactive and high-tech simulation suites for nursing students and access to a vast range of musical instruments and technology equipment for student teachers (2.1.1). These spaces provide students with fantastic training and learning opportunities in a safe and controlled environment before going out on placement.

Student voice

As a union, student voice is an integral part of our mission and purpose. Manchester Met engages in ensuring that the student voice is listened to and acted upon in partnership with The Union, for example via the course representative system and through internal mechanisms such as end of unit evaluations. The Union's working relationship with Manchester Met is strong. Our elected officers and senior staff members always being welcome at the table (2.4.1). This high-level partnership on student voice is highly valued and appreciated, leading to genuine positive impacts on students. Elected officers are full members of Manchester Met's Board of Governors, Academic Board and our Education Officer is a member of Education Committee.

The Union, in partnership with Manchester Met, has facilitated numerous consultations over the relevant TEF period, including a consultation on the move towards semesterisation, away from the

Provider name: Manchester Metropolitan University

block teaching model introduced during the pandemic. The responses received as part of this consultation helped Manchester Met as it transitioned to a semester structure.

The induction survey is fully integrated into the University welcome planning mechanisms. Areas of exploration form the KPIs for the welcome leads, an interim report is prioritised for the first term Education Committee and granular reports are distributed to relevant department leads to be incorporated into ongoing plans.

The Union and University work collaboratively to continually develop and enhance student voice mechanisms to ensure that students are listened to throughout their education. This includes developing novel ways to continually engage with students and avoid over surveying. Following discussions about ways to strengthen student voice within Manchester Met, at the invitation of the PVC for Education, , The Union will be developing a report to take to Education Committee that will strengthen the Student Staff Liaison Committees and the processes that support the course rep system. We look forward to taking this forward and continuing to work in partnership with Manchester Met on student voice at all levels.

Nursing as a Case Study

Nursing schools across the UK and indeed globally, tend to have relatively lower levels of satisfaction with their experiences, particularly in relation to support. This steep decline has worsened over the pandemic period. It is important to acknowledge the severity of the challenges within the external landscape and the constraints imposed upon the University when addressing them. It is notable that Manchester Met's performance in Nursing has been traditionally strong, 82% in 2020. Recognising that urgent action is required, the faculty and department have put together a comprehensive action plan that addresses the concerns raised by students.

The Union commissioned Alterline to carry out an online community with current nursing students to find out how we can return to previous sector leading standards. The online community found that students are largely positive about their teaching experience and the benefits of placements and are largely satisfied with academic support, student voice and assessment and feedback. Where areas for improvement have been identified, they often tally with areas already identified by the University to make changes. For example, students wanted more support around the completion of Practice Assessment Record and Evaluations (PARE). In response the University has reviewed and streamlined the PARE document, which has received positive student feedback including that it is 'easier to use'.

Feedback on academic support highlights differences in the implementation of the personal tutoring system. For the 2022/23 academic year, the department have increased the number of personal tutors available via recruitment and have also developed new guidelines. Students did also share positive experiences that they had had with reaching out for academic support. Responses for questions on assessment and feedback again demonstrated the importance of valuable feedback as well as the support and guidance available to students whilst completing assessments.

The University are applying a tested model of enhancement using voice mechanisms. The departments of Engineering and Economics, Policy and International Business have previously addressed similar issues identified by EARs and their NSS results. Recent results have shown improvements, highlighting that the processes in place are appropriate and effective. We are

Provider name: Manchester Metropolitan University

confident that the comprehensive action plan now in place for Nursing will be effective, and we look forward to seeing improvements in their students' experiences.

Student Outcomes

Student outcomes are consequential to student experiences, as experiences are the road to outcomes and many of the themes discussed so far are seen in the following discussions.

As a widening participation university, Manchester Met positively contributes to ensuring that higher education is accessible and open to all students, no matter their background. This is supported by Manchester Met's measure of educational gain (3.4) and the individualised approach it takes, empowering students to work towards their individual goals. The Union is proud to work in partnership with the University in ensuring that those from WP backgrounds have the best experience and outcomes possible. Recognising this, Manchester Met provides scholarships to first generation students (2.3.2) and has a significantly large hardship fund available to students, which has been increased in light of the current cost of living crisis (2.4.1). By providing comprehensive support to students, it arguably increases the likelihood of them continuing and completing their studies and taking advantage of opportunities that will help their graduate outcomes.

Continuation

The number of students continuing from Level 4 to Level 5 is above benchmark. This is reflected in Manchester Met's report on its access and participation plan (APP) targets, where it identifies that the gap for students with a declared mental health condition against those without for the 2021/22 academic year is 6.7%.

Mental health issues have consistently been cited as the one of the most common causes of induction survey respondents suggesting they have considered deferring or withdrawing from university. The experience of students with a declared mental health condition also intersects with whether students completed a vocational course or A-levels before starting university. The impact of a vocational route to University and a student's likelihood of continuing is not a specific Manchester Met issue, it is seen across the sector as demonstrated by the OfS's continuation dashboard. The intersection of qualification background and a declared mental health condition is significant at Manchester Met, with 82.4% of students with a declared mental health condition and an academic background progressing compared with 69.6% of students with a declared mental health condition and vocational backgrounds.

Given that increasing numbers of students are being diagnosed with a mental health condition, and that this is likely to increase with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, this is an area that The Union and University are taking action.

The Universities in Manchester have entered a unique regional partnership with the NHS and other health services to help provide additional support for students. The Greater Manchester Universities Student Mental Health Service provides a single designated mental healthcare pathway across the city (2.3.3).

Manchester Met has a proven track record of eliminating continuation gaps, as demonstrated by the white and BAME full time UG gap elimination (2.6 Case Study). This incredible achievement gives

the Union confidence that continuation and awarding gaps will be reduced and eliminated at Manchester Met.

Completion

The Union believes in the positive impact of co-curricular activity, such as society and sports clubs, on academic success and continuation. The Alterline survey continued to affirm our belief. In response to the statement 'my current activities at university are preparing me for my future career' there was a 73% agreement from those involved in students' union activity compared to 67% who were not. There was also a 3% positive shift in overall satisfaction with their course from those engaged with union opportunities. The Rise programme demonstrates similar and better returns.

One of the hallmarks of Manchester Met's offer that again supports the institution's values, is the Rise Programme (2.1.3). Rise offers students the opportunity to undertake courses, voluntary opportunities and more to develop skills. Each Rise opportunity completed gives students Rise points, which can then be exchanged for extra academic credit.

The significance of Rise and its impact is recognised both internally by the University and The Union, as well as externally, with it winning a Guardian award and featured as a case study on the OfS website. Earlier in this submission we explored differential outcomes within the context of Assessment and Feedback. Work to address the differential outcomes requires a holistic approach and Rise is one of the ways in which Manchester Met is working to address this. As can be seen in the table below, those who engage with Rise have better degree outcomes. Whilst that focuses on attainment for those who complete their degrees, Rise also has an impact on completion and continuation as highlighted in their submission.

% Gaining a 2:1 or 1 st Class Degree			The impact of Rise on good honours degree outcomes is another example of Manchester Met's holistic approach to tackling the BAME attainment gap which was mentioned earlier in this submission.
Ethnicity	Rise Engaged	Whole Population	
Asian	76%	67%	Progression
Black	96%	62%	
Mixed	92%	78%	
Other	86%	72%	
White	92%	85%	

Manchester Met's overall progression data meets the benchmark set by the OfS. This demonstrates the impact beyond university that studying here has. Manchester Met support student progression by ensuring that students can access opportunities that will develop their work readiness from day one at the university. The My Five Year Plan (My5YP) was introduced as a framework initially within the Faculty of Science and Engineering and was expanded to include the whole institution as a result of its success, as seen in the University's submission (2.3.1). My5YP embeds personal and professional development into students' curriculum and is either delivered via relevant work-related units or by personal tutors. My5YP helps students develop and build an individualised portfolio of experience to help them succeed after their time at Manchester Met is over. My5YP demonstrates the values within the university's education strategy and their commitment towards educational gains. Within the induction survey carried out by The Union, students' awareness of the initiative is

gauged. In 2022/23 survey 79% of undergraduates (n=1131) were aware of 5YP and 27% had begun work on it 4-6 weeks into the first semester. This is in line with the previous years' results when it was introduced. The Union welcomes this additional personal tutoring tool, providing a focus on career readiness (2.3.1).

The EAR process has also identified departments where work needs to take place to further strengthen the personal tutor offering. Comments from 2021/22 EAR reports relate to the embedding of my 5YP into the system. One of the potential reasons behind this variation is that Manchester Met empowers departments and faculties to tailor institution wide policies to their cohorts and related industries, recognising the differing experiences and demands students face depending on their course and background. Allowing for more localised approaches is positive but inconsistencies will inevitably occur.

Reflecting their civic mission and the number of commuting students and students who come from the local area, Manchester Met contributes positively to the Greater Manchester region, linking with civic leaders and businesses to develop skilled individuals who will stay and work within the region (2.2.2 Case Study). Having identified gaps within the region, Manchester Met works towards ensuring their students can fill those gaps, helping to ensure their students' progress. Career support from Manchester Met is available to students as soon as they start and continues after they graduate, with a dedicated team supporting early career students.

With Manchester Met rightly placing a high priority on students succeeding after their studies, Manchester Met asks the following question in NSS to understand how this priority translates to students' views; are you better prepared to achieve your career goals as a result of your course. Whilst a smaller number of students answered this bespoke question, it still provides a useful insight into the work done with students whilst at university to set them up for graduate careers and outcomes. In 2022, 73.8% agreed that they were better prepared to achieve their career goals as a result of their course, this is up 13.8% from 2021.

As a WP institution outside of London and the southeast of England, Manchester Met's progression and graduate outcome results are impressive. This is testament to the cohesive strategy towards developing students' skills, knowledge and confidence via an inclusive, student centred, people led and future focused curriculum, that Manchester Met proudly offers, provides and delivers.

Conclusion

Manchester Met students receive a high-quality education with a positive impact on their outcomes once they have completed their degrees. The creation and development of Rise to support skill and career development demonstrates how educational gains flow through the Manchester Met provision.

The clear thread throughout this independent submission is that throughout Manchester Met there is excellent provision, experiences and outcomes. Where this submission has explored areas that require attention, The Union is confident that Manchester Met is making the necessary changes and that they have appropriate plans in place. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with the University and working with them to continue ensuring that students at Manchester Met have strong experiences and outcomes due to their time at Manchester Met.