



Arden University Students' Association

Student Submission for TEF 2023

“A Celebration of the themes of Independence and Partnership with Arden University.”

Produced on behalf of all Students at Arden University

Written by Dace Rozina, President of the Arden University Students' Association (AUSA)

Introduction from Dace Rozina President of AUSA

This is our first Student Submission for the TEF and we will also be drafting our own internal annual AUSA Student Written Submission which we feel is an amazing opportunity to celebrate and provide feedback from Arden Students on their experiences on an annual basis.

As President of the Arden University Students' Association (AUSA), it's been my privilege to have been a Student, a Student Representative leader and now the President of an extremely exciting project and opportunity which Arden University has provided to us.

The Students' Association started life late in 2021 and started to flourish in 2022, creating the possibility in 2023 to provide some incredible and independent Student services to our Students. The Vice Chancellor of the University, Professor Carl Lygo, has not only championed and strongly advocated for the formation of AUSA but he has made available significant grant funding for every aspect of the association that we have asked for (refusing nothing thus far). In light of the fact that an independent Student body is not a legal requirement for independent universities, it is even more remarkable that we have had this outstanding support from the senior leadership and I hope in this submission we can illustrate the good work that AUSA started on behalf of our Students and to then further highlight areas of success and good practice between the University and AUSA working together to improve the educational experience and outcomes of Arden Students.

In consideration of the fact that we are a fledgling Students' Association, we appreciate that we don't have the experience or the background of other established Students' Unions and this may reflect in the substantive and quantitative data that other SUs can provide. That said, TEF and the

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University has provided us with this platform and opportunity to make this submission and we want to at least try to be brave and to celebrate the amazing work AUSA has started to undertake and celebrate the really important engagement in Student voice that we have started to collaborate on with the University. The two important themes we hope to thread through this submission relate to:

- The Independence and Autonomy of AUSA;
- The Partnership approach with the University that underpins our collaboration;

and we believe that our work collaboratively supports the three core themes of the University's mission, 1) digital first, 2) removing barriers to participation and 3) careers and employability.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Students and Staff that have supported this submission and we feel that the feedback that we have received makes a real difference to the lives and experiences our Students. I would in particular like to thank Prof Carl Lygo (CEO and Vice Chancellor),

who have made themselves available to my constant questions and enquiries.

Message from

"After entering myself into Arden, I can surely confirm that this is one of the best places to achieve your degree. I'm enjoying every minute of my life after joining the BSc Psychology program here. I feel honoured to say that I'm an AUSA member and being a member help assure that all my fellow Students are having unmatched study experience."

"It has been my absolute pleasure to help establish Arden University's first ever Students' Association and promote the independent voice of Students. Arden University has an almost unique profile of Students; average age in their 30's with 90% of Students working/caring alongside studying. Arden University's central mission is to extend the opportunity of higher education to those who would not otherwise easily be able to access higher education. The Student voice has been crucial to the University in developing and enhancing processes and the University's core learning and teaching strategy. Mature Students bring with them great experience and a wider outlook on life which has benefitted Arden University. We have been able to recruit a strong independent board for the Students' Association and they oversee the work and contribution to the University. Representation extends to all corners of the University provision national, international, blended learning, distance learning, full-time, part-time, apprenticeships and by level of qualification.

Arden University is extremely lucky to have strong independent minded Students led by our fabulous President, Dace Rozina. The Students' Association is going from strength to strength, and I know that the foundations we have built together will benefit generations of Students to come."

Message from Professor Carl Lygo Vice Chancellor and CEO



1. Approach to evidence-gathering

The Student Submission draws on a wide range of feedback sources from across the University. The following were the main sources and documents which were reviewed by the AUSA Steering Group for this submission:

- Minutes of Student Representative Network (SRN) meetings
- Minutes and documents from Staff Student Liaison Committees
- Minutes of AUSA's Advisory Board
- Interviews with University Staff we requested to support the submission
- Interviews and Feedback with AUSA Advisory Board members
- Feedback from Centre Leaders
- Student Voice platform analytics
- Programme validation documents
- Minutes from University:
 - Student Experience Committee
 - Learning Teaching and Assessment Committee
 - Academic Board
 - Academic Standards and Ethics Committee
- Student representation guidance/training documents
- Selected Staff-Student activities and projects
- Selected Arden University Policies

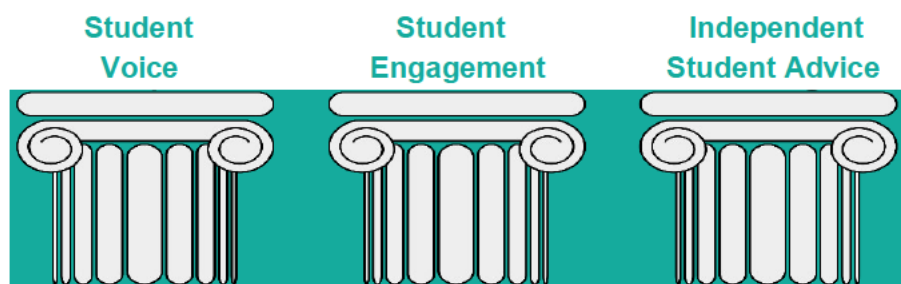
The documents and data that were gathered from the above main sources were then discussed and evaluated by a TEF Student Steering Group, chaired by myself, which also included University Staff and AUSA Advisory Board members.

Although some of our data and support came from the University, for the avoidance of doubt, we would like to state that this submission has been written independently from the University. Shortly before submission AUSA and Arden University have exchanged our draft submissions in the spirit of cooperation and partnership which characterises our established working relationship.

2. Student experience

Partnership with the University to help create an Independent Students' Association

The progress and initial development of AUSA only came about because of the vision, initiative and drive from the Vice Chancellor to help us get started. He has helped lay a foundation for the independence for the Association and his vision has allowed us all the resources necessary to put together a Student body fit for purpose for the unique circumstances of our University. However, we are also keen to stress that the VC's message to the University has been that he wants the Association to behave independently but that, as our sponsoring body, the University also provides both support to get us set up and partnership/co-leadership opportunities to sit on various university committees, to allow us to contribute to the overall Student experience. I am the President and I want to describe some of the governance and structures that we have co-created with the University. We have chosen to base the foundations of the Association on three pillars:



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And the University has provided us substantial funding to employ the following staffing structure:

AUSA Democratic Leadership

- Student President
- Deputy President/President Berlin
- Deputy President UK
- Student Representative Network

AUSA Professional Support Staff

- Managing Director
- Engagement Officer
- Student Representative Officer
- Advice and Guidance Officers x 2

AUSA Independent Advisory Board (equivalent to the Trustee Board in an SU)

- President and Student Representative Network Reps
- External professionals/experts ranging from industry experts, HEI experts, lawyers, EDI experts and Students' Union experts
- University Appointees

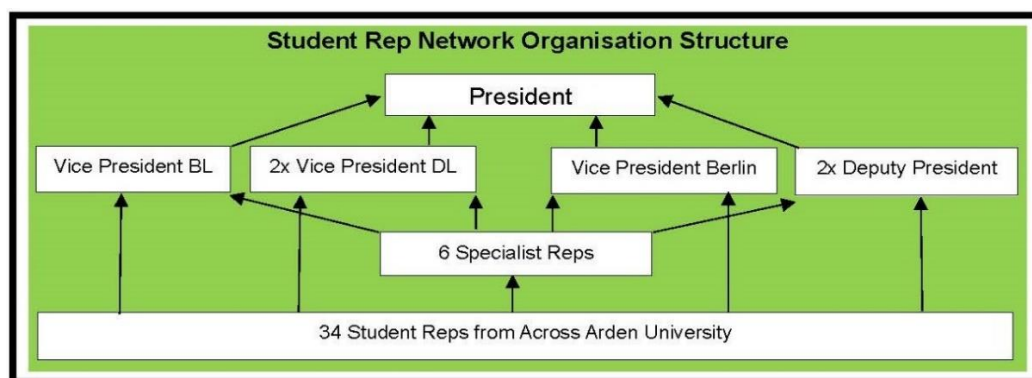
And we have presented and agreed with the University our inaugural:

- Foundational documents
 - Memorandum of Understanding (between the University and AUSA) (MoU)
 - AUSA's Terms of Reference (our constitutional statements) (ToR)
- Student Charter –version 2 for 2023 to be signed by the Vice Chancellor and new President

Impact Summary: The Association, in partnership with the University, has prioritised effective Student Voice mechanisms and there is a more independent and organised approach to supporting Student feedback and actions. We also received funding of around a quarter of a million pounds this year to employ Staff and Student leaders and fund activities pursuant to our three pillars foundation. All of AUSA's Student, Staff, and Advisory Board members have shown a high level of dedication to meeting the challenges of setting up a new Association within a relatively new and rapidly growing University. All have gone above and beyond what has been expected of them with a great enthusiasm for ensuring AUSA's success. Our next step is the creation and agreement of our 5-year strategy which we hope to complete by the end of this academic year.

Student Representation Structure

The Student representation structure, which has been agreed as below, also receives funding in recognition of the time spent on their roles and any resources required:



The University has supported us to provide:

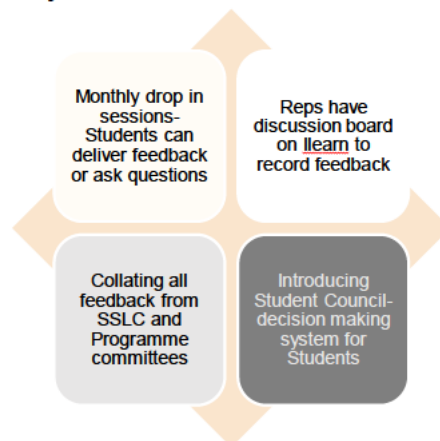
- Training sessions on signposting, collecting feedback, meetings preparation and surveys
- UniTu- What it is, how it works, how to use the feedback as a Rep
- SSLC Actions for each area & Committee timetables
- A Starter pack- The Rep Network, Hints and Tips, Link to AUSA website rep page

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Also providing us an online platform to store:

- Important Docs- Student rep code of conduct
- Student rep network meetings- where we add the monthly updates
- Policies and guides- Committee guide, Handbook, Policy guide
- Job Descriptions- Programme, Specialised, Vice President
- Training Recording and Slides

Impact Summary– The below are tangible examples of what we are doing as a result of the support given to us by the University:

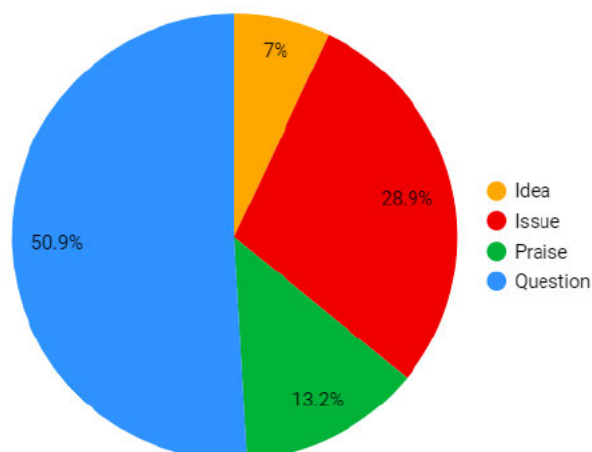


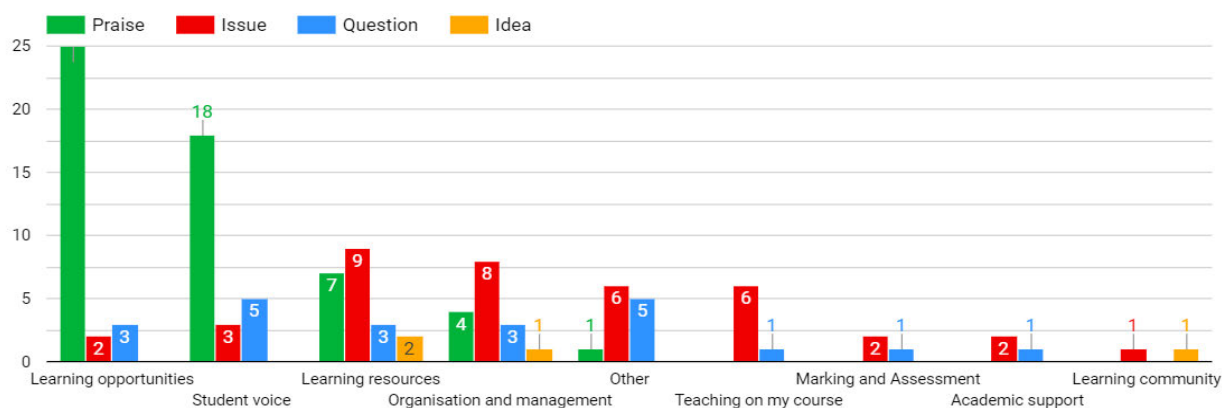
Partnership and Collaboration in Student Voice

Arden University is predominantly a distance and blended learning institution and this brings with it complexities in engaging with both our Students and Student leaders. As part of the solution to tackle this, the University last year appointed an experienced Voice Manager who has worked collaboratively in partnership with the President and Student representatives. One of the partnership projects which we wanted to highlight was the introduction of UniTu, an online Student voice platform to help us collect and review Student feedback.

In this academic year our online Student voice system managed to register 54% of Students, totalling 11,370 Students engaging and offering feedback. This is significantly better than the national average of 30%, highlighting the success and the importance we play in the feedback mechanism. For example, in the first term of this academic year so far, we have had 273 posts, 1506 comments, 1165 votes, and 27,807 views totalling over 30,000 engagements.

We categorise all feedback into key themes, so it gives us a specific focus and drive in areas that need to be improved such as Teaching, Learning resources, Organisation, Student voice and Learning opportunities.





We have dedicated Student members for both the careers and inclusion team; the Students work with the teams to help Arden shape the work they do to meet Student needs. The ability for Students to help shape their learning environment empowers them to take ownership and this is supported throughout their learning community. Specific examples include the AUSA President having full membership of the SCC (Study Centre Calendar) Project Board, the decision-making forum for enhancements to the study calendar, and the Academic Enhancement Action Group which drives all aspects of learning and teaching improvement across the University.

Impact Summary

- Student leaders' engagement has increased on this platform and in meetings.
- Students' experience of the platform has been positive; they have felt much more like a community and felt their voices have been listened to.
- Staff have been able to gain valuable feedback and representative data on Students' opinions and concerns quicker than via previous methods.

Student Voice Goals

Student representation is embedded in every module to ensure a wide range of feedback. We support the university to ensure every module has a Student rep, who engages and promotes Student voice activities. These reps are diverse and reflect the demographic breakdown of Arden.

We have partnered with the University in the recruitment drive for Student reps, as well as extensive training programmes to educate Students on the importance of their learning community and how they can shape and influence their learning environment. Specifically, we focus on where and how they can affect positive change within the University and AUSA. This has been reflected in our new Module surveys which are already demonstrating improved student satisfaction.

Currently we utilise the UniTu feedback platform, with 54% of Students currently active, and we aim to increase this as Students become more exposed to and aware of the benefits of the system. The platform informs the Student voice mechanism of key discussions such as Learning opportunities, Organisation & Management, Learning resources and Assessment and Feedback. This assists us to proactively start conversations around changes and seek Student suggestions. Furthermore, Student Voice and the Student Association are collaborating on creating spaces for Student discussion outside that of the university committees, centralising Student feedback into a Student Council model, this will allow Students to make decisions throughout their learning journey, facilitating changes to their learning environment as well as empowering them to shape experience at Arden. This Council will be informed by key Student groups such as the BAME reps, as well as the Diversity & Inclusion reps, who are especially relevant in the Arden demographic as they will contribute not only to the University's Access & Participation Plan (APP) but will also work with Student voice and the Student Association to tackle factors influencing the attainment gap. Of note, 92.7% of Arden students are covered by our APP and we feel this is significant.

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We will be supporting the introduction of the Student Voice Week (4 per year), which we hope will promote varied and creative ways for Students to feedback on all issues impacting on their Student journey. These weeks will also be a vehicle for feeding back to students about improvements the University is making in response to their feedback, so AUSA will be critical to the success of this initiative, and this is a perfect example of cooperation and partnership. This holistic approach to collecting learning feedback will help us to understand our Student needs better, keeping us informed with the challenges and realities of being a Student currently. We hope this initiative will help the University and AUSA to reach those yet to be engaged with feedback activities, and to collect a variety of responses. This will also coincide with the Student Association recruitment process to enable volunteers and Student leaders to emerge and develop in turn benefitting the change making ability amongst the Student body.

Impact Summary: By regularly hosting voice activities, Students take ownership of their learning environment and understand why feedback is important and how the Association use it to make positive changes to their learning experience. This increase in feedback will ultimately improve current and future cohorts' overall Student experience by both Arden and AUSA.

3. Student Outcomes

Students as Partners in the Validation of Programmes

Our Student reps are embedded in the validation process for our programmes to ensure they have direct involvement in the design, delivery and approval of current and new programmes. The impact outcome of this is that there is a specific focus on ensuring courses develop graduate skills and prepare them for employability. This is with the long-term focus on ensuring our Students go in to graduate level jobs, which will in turn benefit their careers presently and in the future.

As Student panel members, they are full members of the panel, and their views are equal to those of any other panel member. Our Student panel members are expected to participate honestly and constructively in the discussions, make suggestions and share their opinions with the panel and the programme team. The Student panel members' roles are valuable in ensuring that the Student voice is given appropriate consideration. We advise our panel members that it is important that they reflect on the potential Student experience of the programme being proposed based on the information within the documentation presented and we hope their input has an impact on how useful the learning will be in future employment.

Impact Summary: By including our Students in this process it promotes ownership of their learning environment as well as the ability to shape their future prospects and routes into employment.

AUSA Collaboration with the Careers and Employability Team

Careers and Employability is a key mission for Arden and AUSA supports this ambition and the outcomes it delivers for our students. In 2022 Careers and Employability collaborated with AUSA to develop its provision for Students, via two Student steering groups, which supported both the educational experience of Students and their outcomes.

The first group, which included the AUSA President and Student Careers Reps, provided input and feedback to proposed changes and developments that would impact all Students. This group met four times in 2022 and advised on the development of the new visual identity for Careers, provided

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user testing for the new online suite of careers products and services, including a new careers chatbot, gave input to the development of careers videos for Students and fed back on proposals for a new alumni careers offer.

A second focus group was established in March 2022 to capture input from Students with disabilities to shape provision for disabled Students. The group met on three occasions in 2022 and additional feedback was facilitated through a Padlet outside of the meetings. Feedback from these meetings resulted in disability drop-ins increasing in length from 15 minutes per drop-in to 30 minutes and the organisation of Student webinars (from those with lived experiences of disability), sharing their stories and their career journeys. Careers and Employability events have also been promoted through the AUSA Careers Reps network at Arden. This includes a regular monthly series of online career skills workshops for current Students regardless of career stage, as well as 15 employer events which have been introduced following the appointment of an Employer Engagement Consultant in April 2022.

Impact Summary: The Careers and Employability team, in collaboration with AUSA, contributes to the quality of the experience and outcomes for Arden Students, also focusing on activities that are not directly educational but contribute to the quality of the Student experience or outcomes.

Examples of Staff-Student Partnership Initiatives

As a young Student body, still developing and growing rapidly, we have had to rely very much on the experience and goodwill of Staff who in many aspects have given up personal time to support joint Staff-Student initiatives. We appreciate that all Student bodies have Student societies and support university employment initiatives, however, due to the demographic makeup of our distance and blended learning Students, as AUSA, we are particularly keen to concentrate on supporting Student groups who take on projects which improve their employment prospects. We wanted to take this opportunity to highlight five of these partnership initiatives which we feel contribute to the future employability prospects of our membership.

FoSS Social – Faculty of Social Sciences (FoSS) Staff-Student initiative

FoSS Social is a Student-led initiative to create social societies for Students within the faculty of Social Sciences. These societies are for both distance and blended learning Students at all levels of study. The project is currently being developed by a Staff-Student team with the aim to launch the scheme in the first half of 2023. Students across the faculty have completed a survey to identify social societies that they would most like to join – examples including a film society, book club and gaming. This project aims to connect Students with others who have similar interests and provide Students with a social space away from their studies. It also aims to improve Students' sense of community and belonging within the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Impact Summary: This project will create opportunities for Students to build key employability skills (such as creative problem-solving, strategizing, and collaborative skills) as Students will take ownership of the social societies and the running of the project as the scheme grows.

The Art & Design Society – supporting the wellbeing and mental health of Students

The Art & Design Society is a campus-wide initiative to encourage and develop a community of practice across Schools and Faculties. The core aims of the Art & Design Society are to offer Students the opportunity to learn and practice new creative skills, to develop a community of

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practice, whilst also having fun, in an open studio environment, creating art & design and making ties with new Students and other subjects. The society supports Students' wellbeing and mental health, giving them a period of respite from the weekly momentum of studying and enables them to be mindful during the creative process.

Impact Summary: The experiences provided by the Art & Design Society contribute to the quality of Student's educational experience and assessment outcomes across the University. Students can employ new creative skills in current modules and assessments and expand their repertoire of transferable skills for future employment.

Volunteer Lecturing Assistant Scheme - Partnering with Psychology in programme delivery

The VLA scheme (Volunteer Lecturing Assistant Scheme) allows Students to complete an 8-week work experience placement whereby they return to a module they have previously completed as a volunteer lecturing assistant. During this time, they develop their presentation skills (by either aiding the lecturer with group activities in the live lecture sessions or pre-recording a short, additional session on an additional topic related to the module), resource creation skills (by developing a resource relevant to the module to aid the learning of Students), knowledge of the topic area, communication skills and reflective practice.

The VLA scheme benefits a number of groups. Specifically, the Students studying on the module, the lecturing Staff and the VLAs themselves. For the Students, they can learn from other Students, enabling them to build a stronger sense of "learning community" (across cohorts) and encouraging knowledge-sharing and effective study practices. For the lecturing Staff, the scheme allows them to build a stronger connection with Students (which can typically be difficult in the mode of distance learning study, in particular) and to involve them in furthering the development of the modules by emphasising the importance of the Student voice.

Impact Summary: For the VLAs, the experience allows them to build their overall employability via the development of the aforementioned skills, making them stronger candidates for future employment. They are also able to build a greater sense of "learning community" between themselves, the other Students and the lecturers.

Volunteer Research Assistant Scheme - Psychology - Work experience in research

The VRA Scheme (Volunteer Research Assistant Scheme) allows Students to complete a similar work experience placement to the VLA scheme, although this runs over study cycles (3-month blocks) with the option to either leave the scheme at this point, or to continue supporting longer research projects over multiple study cycles.

During their time as a VRA, Students develop research skills and knowledge (around the process of designing research, producing research proposals and ethics documents; data collection, management and analysis; collaboration with external agencies and appropriate communication of research outcomes), teamwork skills (VRA's work in teams through each stage of the research with a VRA lead assigned to each project to communicate with external agencies), communication skills (with team members, their assigned Staff supervisor, external agencies and in terms of writing up clear outcome reports) and reflective practice through assigned reflection logs to be completed before, at points during a study cycle and at the end of a study cycle.

Impact Summary: The VRA scheme not only benefits Students' development of aforementioned skills, but also provides transferable skills that could be applied elsewhere, that develops their

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overall future employability. Similar to the VLA scheme, due to VRA's working closely with a member of the academic team as their supervisor, but also with a group of their fellow Students, there is also the development of a "learning community" as a result of the VRA scheme.

Arden University Mascot Design & Build Project – Fun developing industry focussed skills



The School of Design & Creativity have invited our Students to take part in the mascot design for the University. Set up as a competition, it will encourage Students to work on new design skills for a different set of deliverables and engender a healthy competitive environment which mimics the energy of industry. Part of the project is to visit a mascot factory to experience the real-life building process in this industry. The mascot should attract Students to the University and as the key demographic in question, the design Students will have a clear vision of the marketing potential of the mascot.

Impact Summary: There are numerous benefits to AUSA supporting this project in that it mirrors the activities of industry and going into the world of work. It will also form a valuable part of their portfolio of work which will expand their opportunities and employability upon graduation.

Message from

"As an international Student, the distance learning course from Arden allowed me to pursue my degree in a British university without spending the on-campus fee. I have received excellent support from my lecturers on my BSc psychology degree. I have also had the opportunity to take on different roles within the school and build my resume. I have worked as a lecturing assistant, research assistant, and have spoken at multiple events. I am also a member of AUSA hoping to improve the Student experience further."

Conclusion

We understand and appreciate that we are a fledgling independent Student body and we may not have acquired the experience and operational foundations of an established Students' union but taking into consideration the type of courses and diverse Student demographic of our university, we as a group have been very proud to have started our journey so positively and we have received incredible support, financing and guidance both internally and externally and of course from our Student leaders. I'm very hopeful for the future of the Students' Association in terms of our sound governance structures and collective Student vision based on delivering on our 3 pillars.

I am optimistic and excited that the partnership and support we have received from the University will continue and that by the next TEF submission we will be able to highlight even stronger collaborative outcomes and further celebrate the impact that our Students' Association has had on the lives and Student experience of our membership. We and the University intend to collaborate on an internal reflective process based on the TEF to make a separate annual Student Written Submission based on feedback from our Student leaders and we hope this will help our vision to continue to be partners in our education at Arden and not only to co-lead in our Student experience but to co-create from feedback as partners in our learning.