

Optional Student Submission – Teaching Excellence Framework 2023

Section 1: Approach to Evidence-Gathering

1. This Optional Student Submission is presented on behalf of Surrey students by the Vice-President Voice at the University of Surrey Students' Union, the sole representative body for students registered at the University of Surrey. The Union has reached a top 10 position in the past 2 years in the National Student Survey (NSS), and provides student-led representation to all students. The Union's officer team is made up of 26 officers;

The Union President is the named alternate contact for this submission. The officer team at the Union is supported by a full-time staff team, led by a senior leadership team (SLT)

The wider Officer team, Board of Trustees, and SLT have received this submission and had the opportunity to provide comment and feedback.

3. The Students' Union is a small organisation with no bespoke student insight staff. We therefore sourced additional evidence from our research partner, Alterline, to supplement our existing sources, and included questions on three relevant themes (student voice, assessment and feedback, and belonging and barriers to engagement) in our Student Life Pulse Survey for April – June 2021. At our Student Voice Forum (SVF) events in 21/22, our interactive polling was also designed to gather additional evidence for this submission.
4. This submission utilises both pre-existing and additionally commissioned evidence sources. Our pre-existing evidence sources are as follows, with response rates noted for each data source:
 - a. **Alterline Student Life Pulse Survey – 18/19** (1905 responses [RS]), **19/20** (2182 RS), **20/21** (1716 RS), **21/22** (1694 RS, additional TEF question set received 414 RS)
 - b. **USSU Professional Training Year Survey – 19/20** (69 RS)
 - c. **Trendence Student Survey – Jun – Jul 2019** (732 RS)
 - d. **iGrad Student Barometer Survey – Nov – Dec 2019** (1137 RS)
 - e. **Student Voice Forum** – Q+A forum chaired by VP Voice with a panel of senior University leaders, primary audience is Course Reps. Interactive polling is conducted during the event - **18/19 – Nov** (100 RS), **Feb** (111 RS), **May** (27 RS). **19/20 – Nov** (166 RS), **Feb** (43 RS). **20/21 – Nov** (200 RS), **Feb** (195 RS), **May** (54 RS). **21/22 – Nov** (56 RS), **Feb** (48 RS), **May** (23 RS)
 - f. **Alterline University Futures Coronavirus Survey – May - Jun 2020** (676 RS)
 - g. **USSU Coronavirus Lockdown Survey – Mar/Apr 2020** (472 RS)
 - h. **Alterline Being Well Doing Well Survey – Nov–Jan 19/20** (1679 RS), **Nov-Dec 22** (1222 RS)
 - i. **Course Rep Review – Feb 2018** (Focus Group – 26 RS, Survey – 121 RS, questionnaire – 30 RS)
5. The pre-existing and additional evidence we have gathered and utilised for this submission include responses across all students and courses covered by this submission. The exceptions are our PTY questionnaire, which covers students across all undergraduate (UG) levels on all courses but only those who undertook a professional training year.
6. The Union represents all students registered on a course provided by the University of Surrey. This submission covers all UG courses, including those with integrated postgraduate components. Though Surrey has transnational education provision and validates courses at other institutions, as the University has chosen not to include these courses in their submission, we therefore will not be covering these optional courses.
7. The Union can confirm that the University of Surrey took a transparent approach to the TEF and has been forthcoming with their own plans and progress. The University ensured that the Union had a key contact who has been communicative and highly valuable in meeting with our student contact and Union staff regularly, proactively sharing any relevant data, and who also agreed upon the mutual sharing of draft submissions. Our lead student contact has provided student representation on the University's TEF Governance Panel.

8. As a separate charitable organisation, the Union prioritises the interests of our members and understood this submission to be an important opportunity to highlight students' perspectives on the quality of teaching provision at Surrey. We have maintained objectivity and independence throughout the compilation of this document by ensuring this submission was developed and written independently by elected student officers, Union staff (who are directly employed by USSU), and by utilising USSU evidence sources. In presenting this independent student submission, therefore, the University of Surrey Students' Union can confirm the University of Surrey did not unduly influence any aspect of the content or direction of this submission.

Section 2: Student Experience

Introduction

9. In 2016, the University was named University of the Year by The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide. This accolade was accompanied by a rise in league table position from 12th to 8th in the Times Good University Guide. In 16/17, the University experienced significant strain across its academic and social provision caused by over-recruitment after this national success. The resulting pressure on student services and facilities, accompanied by a University-wide effort to prevent grade inflation and the decrease in good degrees awarded in 18/19 contributed to the University steadily falling in student satisfaction from 92% in 2015 to 84% in 2018, and finally to 79% in 2020. This led to a fall in league tables as a result of this decrease in ranking relative to the sector. The Union lobbied for changes to address declining student confidence in the direction of the University. In 2019, the University introduced the new role of Chief Students Officer, which assumed responsibility for a large directorate, spanning Academic Registry, Employability and Careers, and Wellbeing and Welfare. This joined-up approach to academic and pastoral support for students marked a shift in cultural direction, with the CSO role also providing a direct collaborative link for the Union.
10. Since 2020, the University has seen significant improvements in league table positions and a rise to 6th place in overall satisfaction in the Guardian League Table listed provider ranking. The Union also saw an increase in NSS outcomes, reaching a current position of 7th. The improvements in student satisfaction with the University in our view correlate to a change in strategic direction under the '85 plan' which was implemented at the start of the 2020/21 academic year under the leadership of the newly appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Academic (Pro-VC) in consultation with our elected officers. At the start of the pandemic, the Union surveyed 472 students on what the University should do in response to the crisis, and the overwhelming majority of students called for online learning to prioritise student safety. The University moved to ensure students received their education online, through technological solutions and innovations, and close collaboration with elected officers on wellbeing, social, and emergency support for students. The adaptable and supportive approach to the pandemic contributed to the University's student experience scores remaining stable while comparable institutions experienced significant decreases.
11. Since the pandemic, the focused approach of the 85 Plan and continued partnership working with the Union have resulted in the majority of students reporting that they are receiving a high quality experience, with the University now performing at outstanding levels in each key measure. At the Union, our focus has shifted to groups of students who are less likely to fully engage with the student experience due to socioeconomic barriers. In our 20/21 Pulse Survey of 1716 students, Global Majority and International students' satisfaction with their courses was between 6 and 9% below average, and disabled students reported a 34% lower satisfaction level with their student lives. Now we have seen significant improvements in the University's student experience provision, we hope these changes can go on to benefit the whole student body including all student demographics.

Teaching on my Course

12. Student survey responses show consistently high scores for **teaching content** and **course quality**. For example, the Pulse survey shows satisfaction with course quality and the teaching on courses consistently reaching 82-84% since 18/19, with a minor decrease during the pandemic, when in-person teaching was impossible. We have also seen an increase in satisfaction on the opportunity to apply learning since 18/19, rising to 77% in 21/22. The NSS results for teaching, intellectual challenge, and course content all show the University performing significantly above the national benchmarks.
13. During the pandemic, the Union surveyed students within our Pulse survey on whether they felt they were receiving **value for money** in terms of the quality of their courses. At SVF in November 2020, students rated how well elements of their course had been adapted for **hybrid learning** from 1-5. Captured content

was rated at 3.9 and access to learning materials at 3.7. Satisfaction with course quality remained high during the pandemic, although satisfaction with contact time reduced by nearly 20% from 19/20 to 20/21. As a result, in 20/21 64% of students answering the Pulse survey felt that they were not receiving value for money in terms of teaching on their course, though we have now seen that statistic reduce to 37% in 21/22 which reflects the University's commitment to return to in-person delivery of teaching across all subjects.

14. The University has a strong focus on innovation and engaging with students to improve the academic experience at Surrey, beginning with teaching quality and curriculum design. The University's ongoing **Curriculum Design Review** (CDR) has local student representative involvement within departments and at Board level through the Union's full time representative team, demonstrating a clear intention within the University to embed student partnership within the future of teaching design and delivery.
15. Our 21/22 Pulse Survey, with 1694 respondents, showed that students with dependents, distance learners, and those with a mental disability were between 6-8% less satisfied with course quality. This is indicative of the need to ensure that on a strategic level, the University's plans for developing teaching quality are assessed in detail to prevent further marginalisation of **under-represented student groups** so that the satisfaction gap does not widen. It is important that this work becomes embedded into the CDR so students who are statistically less likely to be satisfied with teaching quality are prioritised in action plans.
16. The Union and University has recently partnered on an **inclusive education** agenda,

This focus has since been absorbed into central University academic governance, and led to a number of innovative projects to address the desire for an academic experience that works for all students regardless of their background, including a new set of inclusive education resources for academics, and a student partnership project within the Surrey Institute of Education (SloE) in recruiting interns to assist with this work. The Union has a strong relationship with the SloE, who provide professional development for academic staff, and our elected officers have also been provided with numerous opportunities to provide feedback on broader SloE initiatives, especially relating to teaching quality and design, assessment and feedback, and digital learning. This collaborative approach to both inclusive learning and teaching innovation shows the University's willingness to embed student representative priorities into the strategic direction of the institution, and we hope this approach continues.

Academic support

17. Academic support at Surrey has undergone several significant improvements in the past 3 years. The redevelopment of front-line student services into the central **MySurrey Hive** and **Academic Hives** has proved successful in providing access to advice and support, and over 90% of 1137 students reported being satisfied with the Academic Hives in the iGrad survey in 2019. Our Pulse 21/22 survey found 1236 students had used the Hive, and reported 89% satisfaction, a measure of satisfaction which has never fallen below 87% since its creation. The University has invested resource in physical spaces to support the academic experience beyond teaching spaces, developing the **Nest**, a study-free zone for mindfulness and rest, in 20/21, and **MySurrey Spark** in 21/22 for collaborative and individual study. Both spaces have been received well; the Nest achieved 91% satisfaction among the 959 respondents who used the space in our 21/22 Pulse survey.
18. Academic support provided by support services such as Disability and Neurodiversity have proved an important aspect of the academic student experience in the past 4 years. In 2019, satisfaction with Disability and Neurodiversity reached 4% above the national benchmark, and more recently, our 21/22 Pulse survey found that 80% of the 356 students who had used the service were satisfied with its provision.
19. Pastoral support for students is embedded within every course via the Personal Tutor scheme, which ensures that all UG and PGT students benefit from a Personal Tutor, often a first contact for matters of a personal and academic nature requiring additional support. 49% of the 1222 Being Well Doing Well (BWDW) survey respondents agreed that course tutors/lecturers at Surrey are very supportive of students experiencing mental health problems. This marks a 13% increase in this figure compared to the previous BWDW survey conducted in 19/20, though still falls behind the average national level of agreement which stood at 52% in 2022.
20. Student perception of the support provided by Personal Tutors varies - whilst in the iGrad survey in 2019 of 1137 UG students, satisfaction with Personal Tutors averaged 88%, this was lower than the national benchmark of 92%, and qualitative insights gathered at our SVF in February 2022 from students found that whilst the majority expressed a positive sentiment about their Personal Tutor, students expressed either a mixed or negative sentiment. These responses demonstrated that the benefits of Personal Tutor

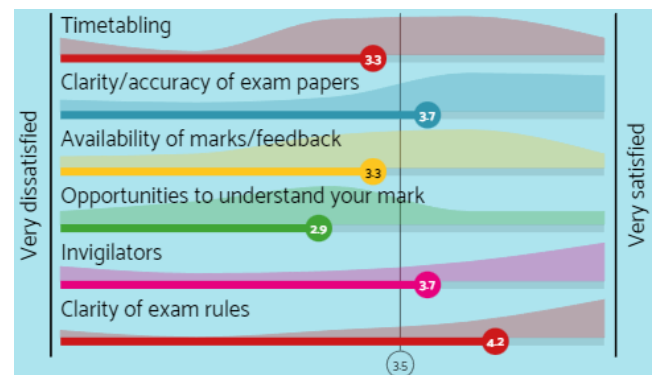
support are not felt equitably by all students, as one student felt that Personal Tutors “*don't contribute at all and are more of token support than something tangible. 15 mins per semester is not support*”, whilst another highlighted their Tutor provided a vital source of academic, pastoral, and employability support:

“I have just started...I had 1 meeting with my personal tutor which was very productive as she gave me various insights into how I should utilise my time at the university and what career prospects should I focus on at the moment.” – SVF Feb 22

21. The University has received feedback from our officer team and re-developed Personal Tutor training, and has increased their recruitment of Senior Personal Tutors. The increase in sentiment that academic staff are supportive of mental health problems is a testament to the ongoing effort to encourage academic staff to recognise the impact that personal circumstances and mental health may have on academic success, and to develop staff to best support students through these circumstances. The Union would like to see Surrey embed these principles in all areas of the academic structure at the University, and to reach those who currently do not feel that academic staff are very supportive of those experiencing mental health problems.
22. The University's ‘**Seamless Student Journey**’ Project (SSJ) was established in 18/19 following extensive research conducted in partnership between the University and Union and began to address different avenues where the student journey could be improved, including reviewing a seamless automated approach to the Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) process. Since the appointment of a new project manager, the project has a renewed focus, and has taken a keen interest in ensuring the Union's close involvement and representation in this process. This project is helping to ensure that whilst the current quality of academic support at Surrey is very strong, opportunities for improvements have still been identified, and we feel the priority for continued development should be to ensure all students feel consistent benefits from the existing support package.

Assessment and feedback

23. Assessment and Feedback has been a particular focus for the Union's representative role of students' interests and for the University's improvement measures as part of the University's “85 Plan”. The NSS has demonstrated that students have consistently been less satisfied with this aspect of the academic experience at Surrey in comparison to other measures which have excelled, with overall satisfaction falling as low as 65.4% in 2019. In the 2019 iGrad survey, 1137 UG students ranked satisfaction with assessed work feedback, marking criteria, and assessment at 2%, 4%, and 2% lower than the national benchmark respectively.
24. At SVF in February 2019, 111 students rated elements of their most recent examination period from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). Practical elements of the exam experience received higher satisfaction, including invigilation and clarity of exam rules and papers. The lowest area of satisfaction was understanding of marks and feedback received. Qualitative responses gathered at the event highlighted a desire for earlier published exam timetables, and **clearer** and **more timely** feedback as key opportunities to improve the exam experience.
25. Since 18/19, there has been a rise in satisfaction with assessment and feedback, evident both in Pulse and also in the NSS, in which Surrey is currently standing at 69.8%. This correlates with the significant attention the University has placed on this aspect of the academic experience as part of the 85 Plan since 2020. Improvements to the assessment and feedback experience have included the redevelopment of marking criteria, a process in which students were consulted via the Union and our Course Reps, and significant work during and since the pandemic to maximise the benefits of digital assessments. Further work is ongoing as part of the CDR to standardise and better organise assessment practices, to increase clarity of assessment expectations and to introduce more efficient assessment organisation, including deadlines and timetables.
26. More detailed insight about assessment and feedback was sought as part of the last 3 months of our Pulse survey in 21/22, gathering 414 responses from UGs. Both statements regarding students' understanding of how to achieve different degree classifications and understanding how to use guidance provided by the University in preparing their work (e.g., assignment briefs, marking criteria) received high levels of agreement at 75% and 77% respectively. Statements about feedback received lower agreement; only 58% felt that the



- feedback they receive is good enough quality to improve for their next assessment. 58% agreed that feedback is received with enough time to make improvements for their next assessment, and 61% reported that they have noticed an improvement in the standard of their work as they have progressed through their studies.
27. Qualitative insight gathered from these 414 students about how to improve assessment and feedback at Surrey highlighted the need to address **inconsistency**, lack of clarity, and poor organisation when it occurs. Marking schemes were described as being clear and well-defined by the majority of these students, and some students reported having excellent experiences with academic staff in both preparation for and feedback on assessments. Others, however, felt staff had not been helpful, and could be dismissive of students' requests for feedback or their concern about their eventual degree classifications. Similarly, the quality and timeliness of feedback was identified as varying across modules; some felt their feedback had been detailed and helpful, whilst others cited feedback being general, vague, and delivered too late to influence their next assessment.
28. **Feedback** has been identified as a key area for improvement by our students. In 18/19, our Pulse survey of 1905 students found 69% were satisfied overall with assessment on their course, but only 56% were satisfied with feedback, indicating that assessment and feedback scores may be more negatively impacted by student satisfaction with feedback than with assessment. The trend of lower satisfaction with feedback has continued for the past 4 years; whilst satisfaction with assessment is slowly increasing and in our Pulse survey now sits at a more comparable level to other key academic measures, feedback continues to lag behind in students' sentiments. This can be seen in the 21/22 Pulse survey of 1694 students where satisfaction with assessment averaged 73%, whilst feedback averaged only 65%. Whilst this does mark a 9% increase in the past 4 years, feedback remains the only core academic measure in Pulse to not reach or excel 70% satisfaction. The priority for continued improvement of assessment and feedback, in our view, is ensuring consistency, quality, and timeliness of feedback in particular. We also hope to see the continued enhancement of assessment organisation and are hopeful that the work underway as part of the CDR will address these areas as a priority.

Learning resources

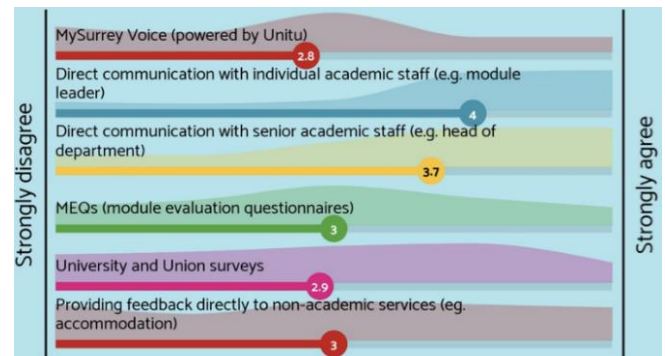
29. Student feedback on learning resources has been consistently strong for the past four years and has reached outstanding quality, performing above benchmark and receiving high satisfaction in our insight. In the Pulse 2 period of 21/22, with 1112 total responses, the **Library** and Learning Resources scored 97% satisfaction from those who had used it, the highest of all the University's services in the survey. This shows a particular improvement from the 18/19 survey of 1905 students which reached only 78% satisfaction. NSS outcomes also show that student satisfaction with library resources is consistently performing above benchmark, and the Union also has a strong collaborative partnership with the Library leadership team and have worked on projects such as the student curator project, and a Liberated Library project led by a previous VP Voice, enabling students to directly influence the provision of learning resources within the Library.
30. Previously, the Union highlighted inconsistencies across different University departments in access to **digital learning resources**, specifically the Panopto lecture recording software, and elected representatives began working in partnership with the University on a virtual learning policy in 18/19. Student satisfaction with virtual learning in the 2019 iGrad survey of 1137 students reached 93%, 3% above other participating institutions. In 2020, the pandemic necessitated a fast adoption of digital technology across all remaining courses and the use of captured content became standard virtually overnight. As a result, in 21/22, 71% of the 1694 surveyed students in Pulse reported being able to engage effectively with teaching and learning materials.
31. The University has also taken a partnership approach to student input into the development of new and innovative teaching resources, and in 19/20, on the launch of the new 'BibliU' software, which provides access to free **electronic textbooks**. More recently, in 21/22, the VP Voice was closely involved in the University's project to renew **teaching spaces** on campus and to ensure these had improved accessibility and flexibility to facilitate flexible learning methods.
32. The University has been acting on student feedback about the need to ensure that additional course costs are clearly advertised in all published course information including required technology through the Union's Cost of Living campaign. Our officer team have also included a focus on technological poverty within the Union's Cost of Living Manifesto, which has resulted in student **access to technology** being examined in detail, including an assessment of the current provision for laptop loans and technology recycling to ensure all students can access the resources they need to be successful regardless of their financial resources.

Student Voice

33. Student voice has long been embedded within University decision-making at Surrey. Under the leadership of the Pro-VC, Academic, and with the creation of the CSO role, the significant **partnership** between the Union and University in highlighting student opinion on the academic experience has strengthened. At an institutional level, SU representation spans the formal academic governance structure, with Sabbatical Officers sitting as members of all key decision-making committees, including Senate, University Education Committee, and Faculty Education Committees. Our Officers meet regularly with senior University leadership, and have long been involved in selection and appointment processes for newly recruited Executive Board.
34. Representation for all students at Surrey is provided by **the Students' Union**. Student satisfaction with the representation provided by the Union has remained high. In the Pulse Survey, 53% of the 1694 respondents reported being satisfied overall with their Union, with only 6% reporting any level of dissatisfaction. When benchmarked against 14 other participating Unions at a national level, Surrey has risen from 9th in overall satisfaction in 18/19 to 2nd in 21/22, and risen from 7th on representing students' academic interests to 1st. In the NSS, we have also secured a top 10 position in student satisfaction in the last two years.
35. At course level, academic representation is provided by over 550 students who volunteer as **Course Representatives**, mentored by around 20 departmental Head Reps. The Course Rep scheme is a partnership between the Union and University; the Union elects, trains, and supports Course Reps, and the University provides Reps with further support and formal opportunities to communicate student feedback. Reps attend termly department-level Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) which report into Boards of Studies, embedding student representation in academic decision-making at the earliest stages. In 2018, the Union conducted a systematic review of the Course Rep scheme and produced 50 recommendations for improvement to increase student awareness of the scheme. The majority of these recommendations were implemented by the Union or in partnership with the University, including the digitisation of Rep elections to create a more consistent and robust process for students. In 21/22, the Union passed a proposal for the introduction of paid School-level **Head Reps** which has launched for 22/23 to provide a clear point of contact for staff and Reps within each School and guidance for new Course Reps. This has been set up in consultation with the Pro-VC, Academic, who has provided funding for the first year of the scheme, demonstrating a continued commitment to student voice enhancement.
36. Since 20/21, the University and Union has partnered on Course Rep promotional activity by recruiting Course Reps as **Student Voice Ambassadors** to actively promote Course Reps, MySurrey Voice, and other feedback channels to students. Our Course Rep measures in our Pulse survey have seen strong increases since 18/19; with 76% of the 1694 respondents in 21/22 agreeing that they know how to contact their Course Rep. Vitally, student awareness of Course Rep achievements increased by 8% from 18/19 to 43% in 21/22, and awareness that Course Reps are part of the Union rose by 4% to 56%.
37. The University partners with us on our **Student Voice Forum** events which run three times a year and has attracted up to 200 student attendees. This Forum is chaired by the VP Voice, and invites students, primarily Course Reps, to ask questions about their university experience to a panel of senior University leadership (Provost, Pro-VC, Academic, CSO, and Chief Operating Officer). The Union highly values the opportunity for students to have a direct feedback opportunity to key stakeholders in the University. Topics discussed have included the BAME attainment gap, assessment and feedback, cost of living, and hybrid learning.
38. As a result of a strong Course Rep scheme, regular surveys including Module Evaluation Questionnaires, and informal student consultation, students have reported very high satisfaction regarding having the **right opportunities** to provide feedback on their course. At SVF in May 2019, 80% of the students surveyed strongly agreed they had the right opportunities to provide feedback. In additional student voice questions answered by 414 UGs as part of the 21/22 Pulse survey, positive sentiments were also received regarding the University's approach to student feedback and implementing student perspectives in educational design. 61% agreed that the University takes feedback seriously by taking action where possible, and 60% agreed that University staff view students as partners in developing quality learning experiences. 65% students stated that their experience providing feedback is broadly consistent with their peers.
39. The area of student voice which has seen lower satisfaction is **seeing action** on student feedback. This statement saw the lowest level of agreement in SVF in May 2019, and more recently, only 58% of 414 students who answered additional questions in the 21/22 Pulse survey agreed they can see how student feedback has impacted their experience at University so far. Qualitative insights found that whilst students do feel that they are given frequent requests for feedback from academic staff, the Union, and wider University,

some have reported that requests for change can be ignored or dismissed by academic staff, and that responses to feedback have been inconsistent, or that no change has been seen as a result of feedback. Similarly, the attendees at SVF in November 22 reported lowest levels of agreement with the statement “It is clear how student feedback is acted upon”. For the Union, we feel a focus for improvement in this area should be the consistency of experience for students providing feedback, and the embracing of the feedback received from students rather than focusing efforts primarily on avenues for feedback to be gathered.

40. One step that the University has taken to address this lower level of satisfaction as part of the 85 Plan is through the introduction of **MySurrey Voice** in 20/21, an anonymous feedback platform powered by Unitu. The implementation of this platform occurred in partnership with the Union, and since 20/21, we have trained Course Reps to make use of the platform. Rep feedback has been positive about the ease of the platform to gather feedback, and Rep activation on the platform has exceeded 85% since launch. Uptake has been slower amongst the wider student population, with activation at 46%, and the Union would like to see activation on the platform take place automatically upon registration. Staff sentiment towards the platform has varied, with some staff resistant to the change. This has meant that platform usage varies from department to department due to varying levels of staff promotion to students. As a result, only 56% of 414 students surveyed in 21/22 within Pulse reported that MySurrey Voice is a useful tool for providing feedback about their course, and our SVF attendees in November 22 ranked the platform lowest in usefulness of a range of feedback channels. We feel there are still opportunities to maximise the benefits of the platform for students, as the tool itself provides an easy way to communicate change as a result of student feedback at course-level.
41. Through the student voice, significant changes have been made in collaboration with the University. Notable examples include the conception and co-creation of emergency regulations during the pandemic in 19/20 and 20/21, the lobbying for the introduction of self-certified ECs to support those experiencing personal issues impacting their studies in 19/20, and, earlier this year, the creation of a Cost of Living working group to address the impact of the current crisis. We have also had the opportunity to provide key feedback on issues such as authoring a BAME Student Experience Report, and keeping Wednesday afternoons free in the academic timetable for personal development and wellbeing.



Section 3: Student Outcomes Continuation & Completion

42. Continuation and completion data at Surrey for full-time students currently exceeds the national benchmark, which is a positive measure of the effort ongoing at the University to support students to succeed in their studies. The Union feels strongly that local and national evidence and research demonstrates a clear link between students' personal and psychological wellbeing, feelings of inclusion and belonging, and a strong sense of community with academic success. We are pleased to partner with the University on initiatives to address these issues in order to positively impact the continuation and completion of our student members.
43. A significant development at Surrey in the past four years to support continuation and completion is the introduction of the **Student Success team** (SST) and the **MySurrey Engagement** (MSE) learning analytics platform. The SST provides in-depth support to students who may be at risk of failing to continue or complete their course, or who have more complex support needs. The SST has a close relationship with the Union's Advice service, cross-referring to ensure students receive the best guidance to support their academic success. MSE is designed to help Personal Tutors and the SST to proactively support students with low academic engagement. Whilst the platform is new, use and sentiment amongst students is mixed. At SVF in November 22, 160 students provided 73 responses about the platform,
- The responses described MSE as a useful tool to visually identify engagement, and the ability to compare their engagement to benchmarks was identified as a motivating factor in their own efforts, but students also suggested the platform should be more consistently promoted by academic staff:

"I find it extremely helpful...I am keeping track of my engagement all the time. Though, I am not sure how often it is used by students." – Nov 2022

44. Our Pulse survey tracks students' **overall life satisfaction**, which provides a measure to better understand how non-academic factors may be impacting upon rates of continuation and completion. In 18/19, 82% of 1905 students rated their overall life satisfaction between 7-10 which indicates high to complete satisfaction. This percentage has fallen considerably since the Coronavirus pandemic in the latter half of the 19/20 academic year. The percentage of students rating their overall life satisfaction between 7-10 fell to an all-time low of 47% of 1716 students in 20/21. This has now begun to see an increase, raising to 61% of 1694 students in 21/22, but still marks a significant continuing impact on student life considering the 21% deficit compared to the highest point in 18/19. The Pulse survey also highlights which **student demographics** have reported the lowest overall life satisfaction during this time. In 21/22, the average percentage of students rating their life satisfaction between 7-10 was 61%. For students who reported a mental disability
this figure fell considerably to only 37%. Ratings from students with a physical disability demonstrated a similar fall to 47%. Whilst these samples may comprise a small percentage of the student population, these figures demonstrate a need for continued attention to the disabled student community at Surrey to ensure positive outcomes for all students.
45. 583 of the 1222 students responded to the BWDW survey reported experiencing a mental health condition, and were asked to state to what extent their **mental health** has had a negative impact on their academic engagement. In all measures, our student population demonstrated a higher tendency to select the most severe available option when identifying how impactful their mental health had been on their academic engagement. 34% felt their mental health had heavily impacted their attendance at university, compared to the national figure of 31%, and 41% felt the same way about their ability to participate in class, whilst the national average was only 37%. Most concerning, 53% felt that their mental health had a high negative impact on their ability to complete work or prepare for exams, 2% higher than the national figure.
46. 57% of the 732 students who completed the 2019 Trendence survey stated they felt the University cares about their mental health and wellbeing, and that there is sufficient provision of wellbeing services to meet their needs. Students at Surrey benefit from the on-campus **Centre for Wellbeing**, which offers a range of short and long-term wellbeing support, and comprises a substantial portion of the University's wellbeing and welfare provision for students. This is a valued service and is widely recognised amongst the student population as a key avenue for support. The Union provides a range of **support services** for students to help promote student continuation and completion, including our peer-led listening service, Nightline, and various support groups tackling a range of wellbeing issues including low mood and depression and eating difficulties. The Union also provides an Academic Advice service to students to advise on issues which may be impacting their academic success, including advising on the extenuating circumstances process. The University's professional services teams and Personal Tutors also regularly refer students to the Advice Service. In our 21/22 Pulse survey, analysis of qualitative data from the 1694 participants identified improvements which could be made to the University's support provision, one of which was increased **cultural awareness** amongst staff providing mental health support. This feedback was also provided as part of the Union's BAME Student Experience report in 19/20 following focus groups with Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students which was taken on board by the University who introduced an EDI lead within the Centre for Wellbeing.
47. A major element of the BAME Student Experience report was the academic success of our **diverse student community**, and has since been an area of interest for the Union in our work on inclusive education in partnership with the University. Despite strong outcomes in progression and continuation, satisfaction amongst our Black students in Assessment and Academic support has fallen behind other demographics, and we would like to see continued focus to ensure satisfaction reaches an equitable level for these measures. We also recognise the importance of celebrating diversity in student outcomes and satisfaction. Forming a core part of the University's 85 Plan, the "Hearts and Minds" priority has led to an increased focus on student **belonging** and sense of **community**, leading to a score of 75.2% in NSS 2022, above the national benchmark of 69.2%. In the 21/22 Pulse survey, 414 students provided insight into their sense of belonging at Surrey. 74% agreed the University is a supportive environment for students regardless of their background, and 67% felt that they belonged at the University. When asked how valued they felt as an individual by the University, however, agreement was lower, at 48%. Analysis of qualitative insights indicated that the wide availability of academic and pastoral support, feeling safe on campus, and the diversity of student societies and sports clubs on offer at the Union positively contributed to a sense of community. Those who disagreed cited feeling forgettable to staff, feeling disconnected if they did not visit the main campus often, and barriers to becoming more involved in university life such as their financial situation or a lack of free time.

48. One barrier to full engagement with university life with a subsequent impact on belonging identified in the past year by the Union is the **cost of living** crisis. At SVF in November 22, attendees rated how concerned they were about the current crisis from 1-10. The general crisis was rated 7.5/10, and the impact of the crisis on their studies and social life were both rated at 6.3/10. Living in Guildford sees our students faced with high average **living costs**; in the 2019 iGrad survey of 1137 UG students, satisfaction with financial support, living costs, and accommodation cost ranged between 10% to 13% below the national benchmark. In the 2019 Trendence survey, students were asked to state the top issues which concern them on a day-to-day basis. 732 students rated both mental health and coping with the course as their highest concerns (51%), followed closely by “having enough money to get by” (45%). In the 2022 BWDW survey, 74% of 1222 respondents said they either have or are likely to take up a part-time job to help with their financial situation.

Qualitative insights indicated that some students felt a high level of stress about their finances, and felt anxiety that undertaking heavy workloads outside university to fund studies would have a negative impact on their academic performance. Some students cited skipping lectures to avoid travel costs, or abstaining from social events and missing out on opportunities to develop friendships and community due to their financial situation:

“After rent I barely have any money left to commute to university for the month, making me unable to attend many lectures, and only pick and choose the important lectures to attend” – 2022

49. Recognising that this crisis has an impact on academic performance, sense of belonging, wellbeing, and therefore, continuation and completion, in 2022, the Union published a **Cost of Living Manifesto**, comprising over 40 actions to improve support for students to enable their full engagement in their academic and social activities at Surrey. The Union has also lobbied our local MP to make representations within Government on behalf of Surrey students to increase national support for students at this time. We have partnered with the CSO to set up a Cost of Living Working Group to make collaborative progress on these actions. The University has demonstrated a significant willingness to tackle this barrier to student retention and success, and as a result, the 2022 BWDW found 16% of 1222 students felt the University is doing enough to address the effects of the cost of living crisis on students, 3% higher than the national average across other institutions.

Progression

50. Progression data at Surrey for full-time students currently exceeds the national benchmark and is outstanding. Employability and personal development are key tenets of the academic experience at Surrey, and the progression data provides a clear indication of the effort ongoing at the University to equip students to succeed beyond their studies, and to develop them both in their knowledge and understanding of academic material, but also to develop them as individuals with skills relevant to their future plans after their studies.
51. Analysing Pulse survey results for the previous four years, the Union has found that **employability** is a top priority for students. The University has developed a strong focus on educational gains and outcomes for students at Surrey, dedicating significant resource into the provision of employability support and professional development. In the 2019 iGrad survey, 77% of 1137 UG students felt satisfied with careers advice at Surrey, 3% above average. 86% were satisfied with work experience opportunities, 11% above the national benchmark. When asked to rate elements of careers support, Surrey students were between 1 – 16% more satisfied with each element than the national benchmark, with only one exception in “opportunities to network with alumni”. The University has since set up the Surrey Connects platform, a networking site through which current students can connect with and undertake mentoring with alumni. The greatest difference was for the “placement” element, with which 85% of Surrey students were satisfied compared to 69% nationally. Satisfaction with the University’s **Employability and Careers service** has risen consistently over the past four years. In the 19/20 Pulse survey, 31% of 2812 students stated they had used the service, 76% of whom reported being satisfied with the support received. In 21/22, these numbers increased to 35% of 1694 students having used the service, and 81% of that 597 base of students felt satisfied with the support on offer.
52. The University embeds professional development throughout the academic experience in the form of the provision of the **Professional Training Year (PTY)** which allows students to spend one year of their course in employment with a partner organisation both in the UK and abroad. In 19/20, students were surveyed about their experiences undertaking a PTY. Feedback about the educational gains of the experience was positive, with students citing how the experience directed their focus for their employment plans. Feedback about the PTY cost and the support provided to students undertaking the PTY was less positive, with some students reporting that they did not feel the level of support received whilst on their PTY warranted the level

of fees they were paying. 33% suggested that improved, regular contact from a PTY tutor would be a beneficial improvement. The Union has since introduced PTY Course Reps who ensure students registered on a PTY benefit from opportunities to provide feedback about their experience, with PTY Reps having access to Unitu and the option to attend SSLCs. During the pandemic, the number of students on PTY significantly reduced. With the return to in-person delivery, and in light of the current cost of living crisis, the Union would like to see the University continue to ensure that the training year is seen to be value for money by increasing the support provision during PTY, and address the wellbeing impact of working away from Guildford.

53. The Union considers the personal development of our students a core priority, and have partnered with the University to support the student leaders who volunteer or undertake paid work for us, primarily through our **Employable Me** initiative. This aims to ensure our students understand that through volunteering with the Union, they develop skills which will benefit them in their academic career and employment. We also partner with the Careers team in offering workshops and resources to our volunteers, and ensure a record of their extracurricular activities are included in their Higher Education Achievement Record to allow them to evidence these roles to prospective employers or education providers. We also operate the **SurreyVolunteering** platform, which allows students to record volunteering hours undertaken within the University community and for third parties. Many students who undertake leadership roles also complete the University's **Employability Award**, an opportunity to recognise their efforts and to encourage self-reflection on how these roles deliver educational gains in the form of career preparation, and developing knowledge and skills.
54. Insight from students demonstrates a high level of confidence in their future prospects; Trendence survey data found 63% of 732 students felt confident about their future career, 4.4% higher than the national benchmark. In the 21/22 Pulse survey, 76% of 1694 students felt their current activities at University are preparing them for their future career. The Union does note that this figure is considerably lower for students who report having a mental disability, at 68%, and so would like to see a focus in the coming years from the University and Union as to how best to deliver equitable educational gains to our disabled student community.

Section 4: Summary

55. The Union is pleased to see a strong dataset demonstrating high and increasing satisfaction amongst our student population, and the continuous improvement that has taken place to positively benefit student experience and outcomes. A number of key factors, such as a broadly well-managed academic experience during the uncertainty of the pandemic, the development of the CSO directorate, a keen focus on employability, and the 85 plan have all played a role in establishing Surrey's current position as a sector leader in student satisfaction. Student representation provided by the Union has also played a key role, especially in providing feedback and collaborating with the University on measures to enhance students' attainment and progression, and to support their development and wellbeing, recognising the inter-connected nature of each element of the student experience. This submission captures a range of measures already implemented at Surrey to meet the features of excellence, both in experience and outcomes, and there are a number of new initiatives which will serve to continue this positive work, including ongoing inclusive education work, the development of innovative teaching spaces, and the roll-out of the new learning analytics platform.
56. The Union would like to see a renewed focus on consistency, as whilst the majority of students clearly agree that they are receiving an excellent academic experience, we note that some groups of students may not benefit from the initiatives outlined in this document to the same degree as their peers. The Union would like to see the University embrace a change culture across their academic structure to make best use of new initiatives to support the student experience and outcomes such as Unitu or learning analytics. We would also like to see a continued focus on ensuring that students from all demographic backgrounds reach comparable levels of satisfaction and equitable rates of continuation, completion, and progression. Finally, with the current excellent standing in national league tables, and the quality of the data in both experience and outcomes, the Union would also like to see the University focus on sustainability in their future growth, rather than focus solely on increasing student numbers. The learning and support environment at Surrey is in a strong position to provide excellent experiences to our current student population, and we would like to see that continue.
57. To conclude, the University of Surrey Students' Union is pleased to present this independent student submission to recognise the significant efforts ongoing at Surrey to provide our members with an excellent quality student experience and to prepare them for life after Surrey, and is grateful for this opportunity to represent our members interests' on how these efforts may continue in years to come.