

Student submission for TEF 2023 – University of West London Students' Union

1. Approach to evidence-gathering

Collaboration with UWL

Here at the University of West London Students' Union, we're very proud of our relationship and collaboration with the University of West London. As a constant mechanism for improving the student experience, we work closely with senior university management to create strategies and programmes of opportunities for students to enhance their learning and education.

To start this report, we wanted to highlight the principles and philosophies that we not only adopt at the Students' Union for students, but where we believe UWL excels at too. This informs where our evidence base derives from, to which we'll include key areas of data that support our statements of how well we feel UWL is achieving its goals around teaching excellence. We believe that our strong partnership with UWL is one of the main reasons why we are ranked number one Students' Union in the country (comparable HEI's) according to the NSS results on question 26, which has been the case for 4 of the last 5 years of NSS survey completion.

Our collaboration with UWL is primarily reflected with our membership and involvement in all the major academic and quality boards, committees, and processes. As an SU with elected representatives for students, our senior management and our elected student sabbatical officers (the SU President, VP Education and VP Activities) have membership on Academic Board; Academic Quality and Standards Committee; Academic Regulations Review Committee; Education Committee and many more. This has allowed representatives of the Students' Union to voice student views, concerns and ideas on all academic matters, whether that be strategically looking to improve employability skills for students, right through to whether a classroom is big enough for a cohort of students. Each elected officer also holds strategically important positions on the Student Liaison Committee; and our SU President sits on UWL's Board of Governors. Therefore, student voice in the highest of strategic board ensures that UWL policy and the future has this student lens, which is very impactful for students. Our collaboration also extends to quality processes such as the University's Education Reviews and Course Approval process. Both processes bring critical insights from students which we're able to discuss, professionally challenge, and act upon. It is as such, the collaborative work academically has been cited as a key contributor to the university being ranked number 1 in the country for student voice [NSS results; comparable HEI's]

Data Insight and Usage

As part of our collaborative work with UWL, we have a further philosophy with regards to data sharing and insight. Almost all aspects of UWL's work with students to support

continuation, progression and completion have a data-informed approach that is shared with representatives of the Students' Union. This approach allows UWL and the SU to understand what students are feeling, and create programmes of work to support students, especially those from underrepresented groups and those that typically find University more challenging. We know that environmental factors as well as personal factors play a huge role in continuation, progression and attainment; and we believe that UWL has understood this approach and used the data to not only identify the areas for improvement, but to inform actions that can take place at an institutional and local level. This data-informed approach means that we are aware that 59% of our students are from a BAME background; 61% are mature students; 58% are women; 55% are from IMD1 and IMD2 areas; and 16% have declared a disability. By having access to this data, we are able to create programmes of support tailored specifically for different demographics, where we feel the most impactful and related to teaching excellence are detailed within section 2.

Any areas where a particular student demographic is either not engaged, or the data identifies that a particular group could be further supported, UWL has put said programmes in place to support these students and change their environments to improve their learning outcomes.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

A final critical philosophy that underpins the University's approach to continuation, progression and completion, is centred on equitable opportunities and meaningful support to all students from all backgrounds. As a university who has an atypical student body, the importance of creating experiences for all has been at the forefront of strategy. Similarly, formal hierarchies of boards including the Equality, Diversity and Advisory Group, Athena Swan working group, and Access and Participation Planning group have representation from the Students' Union and elected officers where specific actions and programmes are implemented to support student outcomes. This year, UWL's Student Experience team has grown significantly to support transition of international students entering the UK – it is recognised that the administrative and cultural barriers international students face as they start university (visa requirements, English as a second language, building social capital etc.) is much more of a challenge than it is for home students. Therefore, a tailored induction programme created by the Student Experience ensures that the transition of international students is supported effectively and their experience is equitable to that of home students.

A key part of student representation within EDI has been the introduction of Equality Champions, a group of approximately 15 students that have applied and been selected to give views and feedback on equality at UWL to support its APP. The role of Equality Champions is to create ideas for change and challenge what is currently undertaken, with the outcome being to enhance opportunities, satisfaction and student outcomes. So far, ideas from Equality Champions have included having pronouns on ID cards; specialist support for mature students who have been out of education for some years; enhanced

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cultural celebrations; improving the representation of wellbeing counsellors; and designated spaces for students with disabilities in the library.

2. Student Experience and Student Outcomes

As part of this submission, we have adopted the approach to outline programmes of work that contribute to students' outcomes. Whilst most of the programmes have identifiable impacts, it is noted that there is some improvement to evidencing how particular programmes evidentially improve student outcomes, though, the rationale for student outcomes can be complex and multi-faceted. For example, the students' union can evidence that student engagement with the students' union positively impacts degree outcomes on a wide scale. In the academic year 2019/20, UWL students who engaged with UWLSU had measurably higher rates of good outcomes as well as higher rates of good honours. Students who engaged with UWLSU were 14% more likely to progress students who did not engage. Students who engaged with UWLSU were also 15% more likely to achieve a good degree (2:1 or higher) than non-engaged students. The data indicated that engagement with the SU also positively impacted the Degree Awarding Gap at ethnicity level, with the gap between Black, Asian, and mixed students disappearing after 2 or more engagements with the SU.

A key part of UWL's success in its programmes is indicative of its focus designed to enhance students' satisfaction, engagement and future employability. We firmly believe a happy, engaged and career-prepared student is much more likely to stay at university and achieve a good degree, especially considering all of the above contributes to student confidence and positive wellbeing (well-researched requisites for student attainment and progression). Therefore, the highlighted programmes below are where we feel have the most impact on the above and will, where possible, evidence this impact through student feedback and data on said programmes.

Induction and Big Conversation

Every new cohort that arrives at UWL has a full induction schedule planned out for them in their first week. This ranges from a school welcome talk, access to the library books, and obtaining their necessary ID's and access rights. Another part of their scheduled induction is the award-winning Big Conversation project – this activity involves every new student having an opportunity to speak to a member of SU staff (student or full-time staff) about what they're looking forward to and any worries they have about starting University. This structured conversation has sets of questions that both UWL and the SU are able to analyse to gain very useful insights as to what new students' thoughts are. The project reaches approximately two-thirds of all new students with this last academic year giving 2636 new students the opportunity have this conversation. The data is therefore very useful, representative and has a huge sample size to ensure validity. Some of the key insights gained about our new students for the academic 2022/23 were:

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- Higher proportion of new students commute to university compared to last year (47% vs 33%), a shift to more students opting to travel to university and potentially an indicator of accommodation scarcity.
- More students would like a job that fits around their studies compared to last year (47% vs 37%) indicating an emphasis on the cost-of-living adjustment.
- We have a much larger proportion of black students with parenting and caring responsibilities (40%, compared to 28% Asian, 27% mixed, 25% of white students)

These key pieces of insights are formulated into a report that is distributed to support departments, academic schools and to all UWL and SU management. This allows the institution and SU to formulate programmes and support strategies based on the demographics, views, and lived experiences of our students.

Student Advice and Academic Regulations

Given the institutions focus on widening access and participation at University, UWL has established itself as an opportunities University for many students that wouldn't have ordinarily chosen to obtain a degree. Our demographics with parents & carers, mature students and students with learning differences or disabilities mean that our students naturally have more complex lives outside of university learning. It is with this that we collaborate with the University to support a high functioning Student Advice service, should students need more time on assessments or support with completing their degree. As such, UWL and the SU work in collaboration to outline a central process for mitigations, appeals and complaints, giving student access to all the information and support they may need right from the start of the University experience. Any UWL student is able to book an appointment with an SU Advisor to discuss their situation, where they will receive an appointment ordinarily within 2 working days. From here, the SU Advisors liaise with key academic staff within the students' school to create a plan of action or suggest appropriate and new timelines for students to complete assignments.

Given the support students received on understanding academic regulations and general support from SU Advice, we received overwhelmingly positive responses from students on their experience with using the service. For the academic year 21-22, the advice service reached an average score of 9.87 out of 10 for "how clear was the advice you were given?" and 9.90 out of 10 for "how likely would you be to use the advice service again if needed?" The SU received positive comments including:

"[SU Advisor] is an amazing adviser without them I would not have been able to go through my major academic offence. Thank you very much [SU Advisor]. I will never forget how helpful you were."

"[SU Advisor] was absolutely fantastic really listened and understood. She helped me and gave me excellent advice, and kept checking in on me weekly which i really appreciated especially since I was going through difficult times. The support was better than I could have imagined."

Academic Representation and Student Voice

A critical part of the University's success and awards has been its commitment to utilising student voice within its academic process. Students are central to academic representation, with every cohort having at least one course representative who is trained to effectively deliver student feedback (including evidence gathering from their peers) which flows through all the way to the University's Vice-Chancellors' executive. UWL's VCE group are then able to view all student feedback at modular-level, course-level and school-level, allowing for issues that students have raised to be disseminated to the management within each school. This combined strategic and operational approach highlights issues from facility suitability, to teaching quality, to opportunities for career enhancement, and many more. Every year, the Students' Union elects approximately 550 course reps across UWL that we regularly contact to not only advise on the course-based issues, but also to check-in on how supported they feel within their roles.

As part of the process, the SU conducts an annual Student Voice Report that details the areas that students give feedback on the most. In total for the academic year 2021-22, we received 194 pieces of feedback, with a total positive resolution of 85% (positive resolution signified as students were happy with the outcomes of matters, or their requests had been met). As it is mandated that courses gather students' views and act on them, this ensures that student views are firstly taken seriously, but also encourages school staff to collaborate and share ideas for best practice. Student voice is then presented to VCE and as part of further academic quality committees and boards, which adds a level of accountability for staff to resolve student matters.

Community Based Activities

The final programme of work covered here is our Community Based Activities, an evolutionally programme commissioned by UWL that gives students opportunities to engage with a range of activities that enhance their employability skills and knowledge. The Students' Union liaise with academic staff to run community-based activities that includes guest speakers; trips to relevant industry institutions; in-house social events that allow students and staff to network; and more. The introduction of community-based activities is designed to embed an employability lense for students, keeping them developing skillsets and building their professional networks, and we're pleased to know UWL value the SU in running this effectively for students. We run approximately 85 activities each semester, with projections set to increase to 100 activities across UWL. At the end of each session students are asked their thoughts and encouraged to give ideas on what they would like to see for the future.

3. The Future

UWL has had enormous growth over the last few years, not only in terms of student numbers and the volume of activities that take place, but also growth within its approaches

to education and challenging its own perceptions to what universities, and their students, expect from their experience. It is this intangible aspect of progression that gives us as a students' union confidence that the University will continue to platform new ideas and challenge innovation – this is why we have dedicated a section to outlining UWL's strive in the future to continue teaching excellence and standards.

Decolonisation

The concept of decolonisation at universities is not new, however the sector has experienced institutional barriers to adopting this ideology in practice overall. Students, sabbatical officers and Students' Union staff have communicated why decolonisation is important to students, where ideas and challenging discussions have been well received and positively considered by UWL. The principles of decolonisation are continually being discussed and attempts to implement within practice and processes are underway across the University. UWL's has welcomed decolonisation to be a guiding principle within UWL's quality processes such as course approvals and education reviews; UWL library has created a focus on creating inclusive reading lists; and a decolonisation presentation featured as one of the prime slots in UWL's Teaching and Learning festival, an annual event delivered to UWL staff on best-practice at the institution.

Decolonisation workshops have subsequently been delivered to student reps too, which was in turn again well received and reflective of its importance in education today. As UWL continues to attract a highly diverse range of students, and international students, the need to shape an appropriate the educational experience is ever increasing. A learning experience that can reflect students' cultures, heritages and backgrounds has been evidenced to positively impact student experience and attainment at university, and we believe UWL understands this and is willing to create programmes to support this.

Inclusive Assessments

The future of education is changing, as is the way that students access and consume knowledge and information. UWL has recently begun to discuss the need for inclusive assessment practices, an ideology which describes new, innovative ways to test student knowledge and learning outcomes. We believe that UWL see inclusive assessments are of paramount importance to student success, as it has created an inclusive assessment working group to gather best practice and generate ideas from within. As membership to this working group include lecturers, VCE, the SU and Quality personnel, the inter-departmental approach is strong and considered to be furthering new approaches.

Students have very consistently reported the challenges that assessment types have in reflection of diversity of students and learning needs - many have cited that written exams are outdated and anxiety-inducing; presentations can be challenging for students with learning differences; and assessments' links with curriculum do not represent the demographics of students that are studying the subject. This knowledge sharing across the institution and the willingness from UWL senior management to explore whether it can form part of quality and standards is another positive step in commitment to teaching excellence for all students.

UWLSU TEF Submission – Video (link enclosed and YouTube; and script)

Link:

Participant 1 :

Hello, my name is _____, and I'm the President of the University of West London's Students' Union. Our students are incredibly inspiring coming from all different walks of life. Most are the first in their family to go to university, come from a BME background and commute over an hour to get to campus. And many of our students also work and care for others whilst they study. We want to ensure that they're confident and skilled to take the next steps in their life and career after university. This work has resulted in us being ranked the number one Students' Union in England for the last four years.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission for the TEF and we have chosen to combine a written submission with a video. We thought the best way to tell the story of our students and the way their learning has been supported was to let them speak for themselves. So here they are.

Tell me about your journey to university

Participant 2

So, I started studying _____

_____. I love doing anything Media. I discovered a love of radio through my course. I discovered a love for audio, so doing podcasts, video and things like that has allowed me to discover so many new skills.

Participant 3 :

So, I was originally on the _____ course, but after COVID, I decided that wasn't really what I wanted to do anymore. So instead of dropping out, I saw that UWL had an _____ course, and I thought that would be a better fit for me. And I've really enjoyed it so far, and I've been provided with a lot of practical learning opportunities already.

How is the quality of teaching on your course?

Participant 4 :

The quality of teaching has been phenomenal. First year was amazing and just the teachers, they are all very unique, very different lecturers, and they have different strategies and techniques, and it all works very well, and they are all very different but always deliver the message in the best possible way for us to understand. And the lecturers are very approachable. They are available when you email them, they'll respond to you like the same day, sometimes within the hour. And then second year has completely different lecturers as well. And we like that every module has its own lecturer and we're dealing with a completely different set of lecturers from the first year in the second year. And we have 1 to 1 tutoring. I like that. You know, I like to touch base with my lecturer, my tutor. And also it's very helpful when you have really personal questions and you want to have personal conversations, you know, not only about the university, about learning, but about life. About the day-to-day challenges you're facing. And, you know, as a person living in London and you're able to talk to your tutor about this and your tutor is always willing to help and listen to you, I quite like that as well.

Participant 5

So, I have my personal tutor who's always there to help me. He teaches first year students, and he was my first-year course leader, but he's still my personal tutor. So, he proofreads my work for me. He does 1 to 1 with me every now and then, catching up with me, asks me how I'm doing and how

I'm not doing. And if I have to submit my work, even if it's not his module, he's available to kind of direct me, like proofreading for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes and stuff like that. And it's not just him, but the other lecturers also. They are available anytime you call to them like, I don't understand this for example. Two weeks ago, I reached out to one of the lecturers that I was struggling with referencing, and after his lectures he said, if I had time, he could show me a few minutes and I stayed. And then he showed me, and it appears that it was easier than I thought. So, I think we get all the help and it's amazing so far.

How are the facilities and resources at UWL?

Participant 6

The facilities at UWL are really accessible in my opinion. Like there's many different ones, in the form of studios, instruments, even as minor as cables that you have access to. And I, as someone who doesn't have much access to that in their home life, it's really helpful being able to book it out on the MRC and just be able to use it whenever I need to. And it helps me practice more, do more with my work because I have that ability to be able to go and get whatever I need, whenever I need it.

Participant 5

So, it's really helpful that, you know, the uni offers all the equipment whenever you need it. So basically, the resources have been great. So, I'm able to access online learning from the library. So, most of the books that are in the library, I can find them online. So that means I don't have to travel from _____ to here. But at the same time most importantly it is open 24/7 if I want to come here or if I want to go to the other campus, which is _____ where I live in _____. So, you notice that you can always go there. If I don't want to stay at home _____, I can walk in about 9 p.m. when it's quiet. So I think for me that is really good and it's helped me a lot with my studies as well because then I know that if I'm busy during the day, I can go to the campus at nighttime, whatever time it is if I have the energy to go and study and they are there or better off, better still, I don't have to go to campus. I can still access them online, which is really good. And most importantly, what I think has really helped me with my studies is the Microsoft you get free if you're a student. So, then I can do my work with PDF and Microsoft Word and Excel and stuff like that, and that is helping me with my assignments. So, it sort of helped me to kind of submit my work on time as well because I feel like the resources are there for me to use and it's easier also for me to use as well.

Have you had the opportunity to give feedback on your course?

Participant 3

I feel like I always have an opportunity to give feedback on my course. Our Course Rep is really good at spending time beginning or the end of class to ask people what they liked, what they didn't like, and any feedback that we have about our lecturers or coursework. So that's been really helpful.

Participant 5

So, I got the opportunity to be a Course Rep from last year to represent in my course and then through that I managed to join _____

_____. And therefore, me being a student and a Course Rep, I got the opportunity to sit in and my feedback was really taken into account as a student and that is really good on my side. And also, students can approach me and they can tell me all sorts of things that they're struggling with. And I can go to the course leaders to speak to them.

How has your engagement with the SU helped your studies?

Participant 4

My engagement with the SU, it's been priceless because being able to have a connection _____

with the SU helps you to gain a little bit more knowledge and to be invited to the training, the SU has trainings for Course Reps, so we do this half termly training where they order pizzas as well, I like the pizza Domino's, and then they will train us and we will learn about being a Course Rep and about just how to take feedback from the other students to be able to listen to them and take notes and take the questions that will be fed back to the Rep. And also, the SU obviously have a desk that you can go to if you need any questions they are there. There's always somebody at the desk, which is surprising, how they have someone at the desk all the time. I think that's really good of them. And if they don't have the answer to the question that I go for, usually they will point you to the right person or give you the email or telephone number to contact someone else.

Participant 6

So, my engagement with the SU has helped a lot with my course because I feel like our Course Reps are very active. They, you know, they help all of us individually make sure we're all feeding back to our lectures and everything that we say to them is getting fed back to the lecturers as well. So, things can change, be adapted and help make sure everyone's feeling included, everyone's learning and everyone's doing well on the course, and it really helps because it gives us, you know, a feeling like we are actually being listened to by our lecturers. And it's not just we're just there and they're just teaching us it feels like we're actually together. So that's really helpful. And there's other times as well where like recently last week we had a guest lecturer or guest speaker come into our lecture, and that helped me a lot because I felt like it showed a very modern, very up to date active person in my industry showing me what's going on and help me see things, how they are currently, which is different to how they are currently in lectures because it's like in lectures it's just presentations and the lecturers talk from past experience. But this was a person who's actively in the industry now and giving, you know, up to date feedback of how things are and how things work. So, it was really helpful to see that up to date current visual.

Have you accessed any of UWL's Support Services?

Participant 2

So, the Student Services I've used the most is the Mental Health services during the COVID period with having access to a counsellor here on campus or on Zoom, which was extremely helpful. And one of the latest things I've used is the Mental Health and Disability Service, which I approached

and now I have all the help I need to perform well.

Participant 4 :

So, they have careers, employability and that is amazing because that part is the University of West London at its finest. So basically, this service, they're connected to a lot of companies, a lot of private companies, public companies, the government, blue chip companies, corporate companies and the courts. And through this career service, they connect you to go and get work experience with firms. I went to work with a firm, one of the top five , and this was through University of West London careers. How they can even get you in there. So I had the honour of going in there in the City of London, and I worked there for days in one of the tall skyscrapers and I felt like a really important because you are among . They embrace you there, they knew that you came from the University of West London. They have a scheme to just pilot you in there. And that was really brilliant. I also have now an opportunity through the career services to go and shadow , either in Cambridge or Brighton. So, this is through the career service again. The University of West London has strong links and good relationships that they've built outside of the university. That makes it possible for you to be able to gain these work experiences whilst you're studying.

Do you think your course is preparing you for your future career?

Participant 2 :

To give you a perfect example, , I would have not been able to speak in front of a camera. But yet through all of my courses and all of my lectures, I learned how to be comfortable in front of the camera, behind the camera, I've learned how to use a radio studio, and I've learned how to write better. I've learned how to use the cameras. And that's all the skills that I can take on with me once I graduate, even if I'm not too sure where I want to go yet, all of these skills would be useful.

Participant 3 :

With all of the practical learning opportunities and coursework, I feel that is really preparing us to go into the industry. They also encourage us to be really creative with the that we plan, which I feel like when we graduate and go into the industry, it's going to make us really unique and stand out. They also teach us about lots of different types of so that we can all really discover what really calls to us and I think that when we graduate, we can all go into the industry pretty confidently.

Participant 6

I feel like my course is preparing me not just for my idea of my future career, but for other options and paths that are available to me. Because I've got a broad sense of what's going on in the industry and it's shown me different things that are available to me, and it's opened my eyes to what else I could do in the industry if my chosen path isn't what I want to do in the end when I graduate. So that's really helpful that they're giving us a broad selection of different ways we can take, you know, our passion and turn it into a career. So, it's really nice that they've given us that opportunity.