

The Markfield Institute for Higher Education (MIHE)
TEF Student Submission 2023

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Approach to evidence-gathering	3
3. Student experience	5
3.1. The teaching at the institute	5
3.2. The support available to students	5
3.3. The level of student development	6
3.4. The representation of student voice	6
4. Student Outcomes	7

1. Introduction

The Markfield Institute for Higher Education (MIHE) is an educational institution based in the UK that specialises in providing unique Islam related programmes at the Bachelors and Masters level. The institute, despite its relatively small student population, runs a variety of programmes in areas such as Islamic studies, education, pastoral care, finance and sustainable development. The following report will seek to assist the Office for Students in providing a Teaching Excellence Framework grade for the institute, by providing insight into the students' views with regards to the student experience and the student outcome aspect of the university. The report will first describe the approach taken towards the evidence-gathering required for this report and how the student body contributed towards the report's submission. Thereafter the report will seek to provide a comprehensive and succinct analysis of the student experience at MIHE through the unfiltered presentation of student opinion on areas such as teaching, support and student development. The report will then conclude with a short section discussing the student outcome aspect of the success experienced in and beyond studies and the educational gains delivered for students.

2. Approach to evidence-gathering

This report, though drafted by a single student from the Markfield Institute, was finalised after consultation with the representatives of the student body at the Institute – the body that represents students is called the Student Council at MIHE. The Students Council comprises elected representatives from each academic course at each level of study and from each of the three campuses. It operates independently of the Institute's management, and is responsible for coordinating the student voice. It appoints its office-bearers, meets a number of times a year, and also organises social and extracurricular activities for the students such as social gatherings, trips and sports activities. The Students Council members are invited to course committees and academic board meetings (which take place three times a year) by the Markfield Institute, where they are able to present the students' concerns, issues and general feedback/opinions to the course leaders and the Senior Management Team. Thus, the Students Council, and its President in particular, is in close contact with the students and aware of students' issues and experiences. The Council is also in close contact with the academic staff and the Senior Management Team of the Institute.

The student body at the institute is split over three campuses across the UK, Markfield, Birmingham and London. The primary and original campus of the institute is located in Markfield and has the largest share of the student population. The Birmingham campus is located at the As-Suffa Institute in Aston, Birmingham. The London campus is located at the London Muslim Centre adjacent to the East London Mosque, serving as the most distant campus of the three, geographically. The share of students across both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the Markfield campus alone outweigh the combined student number in Birmingham and London. This imbalance in student ratio across campuses can be seen due to

the relatively new nature of the external secondary campuses combined with the restriction to only a limited number of BA programmes being available for students studying outside of the main Markfield campus.

The author of this report is the same as the individual chosen for the role of the TEF student contact and chief coordinator for the content of the TEF student submission. The author's role as Student Council President required him to be in frequent and regular contact with the student council representatives for each programme at each respective campus. The Student Council policy of regular campus specific and cross campus meetings enabled there to be a representative voice for all students in any decision making. The cross campus meetings in addition to the President's individual meetings and conversations with representatives and students of all three campuses have contributed towards this report's validity in representing the student voice within the institute. In addition to this, the President's enrolment at the primary Markfield campus allowed for personal interaction with the majority of the institute's relatively small student body, thus greatly assisting the representative nature of this report.

This report draws heavily upon the opinions, recommendations and contributions of all student council members. The contributions of both the male and female representatives from each yearly cohort on each programme truly allowed for a representative report. The feedback acquired by representatives from students throughout the year was recorded in the minutes of any meetings that were conducted and in the long term memory of representatives from their informal conversations with fellow students. Due to the limited contact hours available for students outside of lectures combined with the multi-faceted commitment-filled lives of every student at MIHE, the Student Council was not able to conduct effective institute-wide surveys or representative focus groups for quantitative data qualitative analysis. However, due to the small numbers of students, both formal and informal issues and feedback acquired by the representatives from students throughout the year were brought forward and recorded in the minutes of meetings that were held by the Students Council. The students' opinions, concerns/issues and feedback were also reported directly to the academic staff and the Senior Management Team of the Markfield Institute in various Boards to which it was invited to.

The TEF student submission was produced independently by the student representatives, with minimal contact with the administrative and governing structure of the institution. Any contact with the administrative and governing structure has solely been either to clarify certain matters or to receive statistical data. The student council representatives can assuredly state that the university did not unduly influence the content of this submission.

3. Student experience

The following section of the report will seek to succinctly address four key areas.

- I. The teaching at the institute
- II. The support available to students

- III. The level of student development
- IV. The representation of student voice

3.1. The teaching at the institute

The standard of teaching and calibre of lecturers at the institute was found to be excellent by all students across all campuses. The wide breadth of expertise and academic brilliance coupled with fantastic personal skills and teaching ability were highlighted by every single student whom the student representatives interacted with when discussing this topic. Vast majority of students were also appreciative of the accessibility and conduct of the teaching staff despite the large volume of commitments they each have in and out of the institution from the pressures of the academic world. However, due to the four year remit of this report, it is necessary to highlight the mix of both fresh and departing faces amongst the faculty over this time span. As this is a student submission, the reasons for this are beyond the remit of this report. However, it should be noted that the student consensus is that the institute has hit the nail on the head with every new appointment it has had to make. Thus offsetting any potential negative effect from the revolving faculty through inspired hiring choices.

3.2. The support available to students

The academic support offered to students is in line with if not superior to the standard that can be found across larger universities across the UK. The small nature of the institute once again offers a unique perk to students of simple accessibility to academic staff physically or virtually. Furthermore, efforts have been made by the management to provide both in-person workshops and digital resources to aid students in acquiring the necessary skills for university grade work. One area of noteworthy mention is the incredible culture and environment created by the faculty to accommodate students and develop an almost familial bond amongst the small student body. As part of all reports, out of potential suggested areas of refinement with regards to student support, the only recurring opinion raised by pupils and thereafter sought to be addressed by management was consistency amongst markers in feedback style. This issue was discussed with the academic staff and a number of actions were taken by the Institute such as enhancing the assessment feedback template, and providing staff training on feedback methods.

Students are offered a wide range of resources during their learning to support their academic growth. The institute employs the use of the Moodle virtual learning environment while also providing access to online learning resources through EBSCO and JSTOR databases, allowing students to access e-books, journals, business reports and a wide range of academic material.

3.3. The level of student development

The manner in which students develop by enrolling and thereafter graduating from any BA or MA programme nationwide is known and in no need of detailed discussion in this report. As

assessed by the respective quality assurance boards, areas such as research, communication, critical thinking and problem solving are all integral to the teaching and learning at the institution. The development of these core skills can be found in all UK universities including MIHE due to the manner in which the higher education system in the UK has been designed. MIHE's specialisation in Islam related fields of study allow for the development of student's specialist knowledge in areas of education, pastoral care and finance under the guidance of experts in both the academic and practical areas of each field.

The only downside experienced over the last four years was the unavailability of placements due to circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. The unavailability of placements and remote conferences limited the employer engagement and professional practice that could have been experienced by students at MIHE. However with the pandemic a quickly fading memory, there looks to be renewal from the management in this area. The Institute also exposes students to the works of academics from other universities through its monthly public lecture series – to which academics from other universities are invited to share their research with staff, students and public members. This provides students with the opportunity to gain valuable insight into the life of academia and current areas of research.

3.4. The representation of student voice

The student council can confidently conclude that through the proactive style of representation implemented by representatives, students across campuses have been able to have their voices heard. As highlighted above, the representative structure of the council, coupled with the regularity of the student council meetings allowed for consistent and effective communication between the student and governing bodies. This representative nature of the council is further amplified through the purely mathematical ratio of student representatives to the whole student body, due to the small student body requiring a male and female candidate for each programme for each yearly cohort. The effectiveness of this representation was seen in changes to amenities, academic support and access related issues across campuses. Such representation also served as the launching pad for deeper and more transparent discussions surrounding assessments, disability and technical support, extracurricular activities and social media marketing.

The Student Council has actively brought forward to the attention of the Senior Management Team of the institute a number of issues raised by students over time such as the following:

- To purchase additional copies of some core text books in the library
- To enhance online learning resources
- Need to increase the library opening hours during assessment periods
- Need for 24 hour access to the main building by students who live on the campus
- Issues related to students accommodation such as to replacing broken equipment/facilities in students accommodation

- To avoid assessment deadlines during the month of Ramadan as most students would be fasting and find it difficult
- Tackling the poor Wi-Fi coverage in parts of the campus

These were all discussed with the Students Council and addressed by the Institute over time. Some issues require ongoing attention of the Institute.

4. Student Outcomes

The institute's predominant focus on humanities and social science based programmes of study automatically provide its students with less defined career pathways. Despite this future career ambiguity the institute has great success in student completion rates and in inspiring students to continue their academic pursuits via a Master's degree. Students have also received employability support beyond study and academic related areas through workshops and events designed to hone job hunting skills. These workshops are supplementary to the personal development students experience in their academic journey at the institute. Students leave the institute having improved their confidence through giving presentations and making videos, while also enhancing their interpersonal skills through networking. These skills with characteristics such as teamwork build work readiness within students and provide the necessary tools to fulfil the functionalist purpose of the UK higher education system. Though arguably, the niche nature of Islamic humanities affiliated topics prevent students of such subjects from improving their commercial awareness in such fields without being active practitioners.