Sheffield Students' Union: TEF Student Submission 2023

INTRODUCTION: SCOPE AND AIM

This submission was written by   Sheffield Students' Union [SU] full-time Education Officer, with support from SU staff and the 12 elected Officers.   met regularly with the University's submission lead,   Deputy Chief Operating Officer, and had access to the University's draft. The content of the submission was not unduly influenced by the University and independence was maintained.

Overviewing our National Student Survey [NSS, 2022] and existing annual surveys, we see that students have a very good educational experience - scoring at, or, above benchmark for all indicators - at Sheffield. The University describes its core purpose as being to deliver world-class research, innovation and education by working as 'One University'. To present how our students experience this on the ground, we undertook an initial demographic analysis of NSS results. This identified the avenues for further qualitative enquiry; shaping our research and submission:

1. **Experience of Assessment and Feedback** - while in line with the sector benchmark, assessment scores are comparatively low amongst the University's indicators. Post-covid, what do students need, value and expect?
2. **Do Students feel their Voice is Valued?** - high NSS scores continue to be consistently above the sector benchmark, but a declining trend of satisfaction institutionally (77% in 2019; 69% in 2022) warranted further exploration of students' experience.
3. **Belonging to a Learning Community** - we believe this is foundational to support a meaningful education across indicators. While the NSS shows a positive trend, significantly above benchmark, it also indicates variation across the student body, and departments, that we sought to understand.
4. **The Underrepresented Experience** - whilst recognising the strong offer that the University of Sheffield has, the NSS tells us that experiences can vary across different student groups - generally, disabled students, BAME[1] students and students from IMD q1,2 report lower satisfaction[2] with their educational experience compared to their counterparts.

We believe every student is different and therefore wanted to ensure a diversity of student experiences, from across the student body, were represented. As quantitative data on underrepresented student experiences are correspondingly limited, further meaningful research involved holding Forums and Liberation Panel interviews. While sample sizes of the fresh data vary, a range of sources were used to gather a deeper representation of students' intersectional experiences and stories; beneath the broad data available (NSS). While our findings show a diverse range of student experiences, we will summarise the dominant themes below.

Executive Summary :

A recurring theme from our student research is how *'welcoming'* it feels to study at Sheffield. There are examples where students really thrive: learning resources, opportunities, academic societies and educational third spaces, such as the innovative library services and exhibitions, are scored highly across the student body (NSS). Our annual survey corroborates this - 80%[3] of our students are satisfied with their overall learning experience. Throughout our research, we have found that students highly value the holistic education offered by the University and SU together - enabling diverse skills development and social capital (through societies, paid internships, volunteering, changemaking and leadership opportunities) to thoroughly support students' completion and progression. For students in some faculties, in-curricular, paid placement

---

[1] BAME has its limitations, as it homogenises ethnic groups which face different challenges in their University experience. We use it only as a signifier to describe the common experiences of underrepresented Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students.
[2] From a smaller sample size - due to underrepresented nature.
[3] Existing Data Source 02

experiences involving pre-workshops and mentorship, have grown their confidence, community connectivity and collaboration skills. This particularly supports the equitable progression of underrepresented students. For example, the Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) scheme, where students across the University are paid and trained to co-design their research projects with support from a Supervisor. This demonstrates the value of localised knowledge exchange initiatives and working as 'One University'.

Further, Education Conference events organised annually by the University's Elevate team[4] are outstanding spaces where talented staff share best practices through workshops and student panels, with the ongoing aim of actively enhancing the Sheffield student experience. This has involved themes of inclusive digital learning and meaningful skills development. The SU has also been invited to collaborate on an upcoming Building Community event, which will focus on supporting students' sense of belonging. Officers have also been invited to co-develop the University's EDI strategies e.g. the Disability Equality Strategy & Action Plan.

However, we find that these strategies translate inconsistently across the student body's everyday experience as faculties and their departments operate in devolved ways and barriers to access exist. The NSS highlights that Engineering and Geography record consistent and very high positive student satisfaction scores across most factors. Distinctively, Law, Psychology and Business (large cohorts) score comparatively low. Students highlight benefiting from excellent, localised innovations administered by faculty, or department staff, but the dissemination of best practice can be limited structurally. Significantly, our research foregrounds an even more substantially resourced and flexible approach to incorporating the needs and interests of underrepresented students into the curricular, and life at Sheffield is needed to support and embrace an equitable learning experience for all.

In order to support 'One University' aims, there are key points of action, drawn from our diverse data collection, that could improve the student experience further. The University also recognises these as areas of focus, with corresponding steering groups established, and we look forward to continuing to work as partners to deliver this:
- Students overall feel there are opportunities for their voices to be heard (NSS), but call for **more inclusive, visible and resourced co-creative modes of representation** so their involvement leads to meaningful change.
- **Resource diverse and inclusive assessment practice**, learning from the pandemic and normalising inclusive learning across the institution, particularly welcoming for our disabled students.
- **Coordinate innovative tracking of underrepresented students' progress** to invest in further, narrowing the award gap and supporting their learning experience.
- **Provide higher adjusted levels of specialist academic support** to offer an equitable experience for international students (who record disproportionate appeals) and for mature students to complete their degree after Foundation (who have low completion rates).
- Harness the Programme Level Approach (PLA) to **integrate in-curricular skills** development: students seek experimental assessment where formative failure is safe, where **interdisciplinary** group work is supported and **iterative feedback** is mainstreamed to inform a students' development.
- Resource and provide **more contact hours to enhance social and community-based learning** opportunities. Students highlight that increasingly large cohorts foster isolation and competition
- Support low-stress group work and learning; enabling students to **experience and understand different cultural backgrounds**, educating toward an open worldview and supporting belonging - **international students** consistently highlighted that cultural interaction and learning across home students and the intersectional international community is **not enabled** in-programme; barriers exist.
- Greater **centralisation, inclusion and realisation of wellbeing in course design**, rather than signposting to peripheral support. Notably, 65%[5] of our students say stress and anxiety impact their educational wellbeing while 63% are worried about workload. A community culture of wellbeing, supported and personalised learning is essential to students' completing and progressing happily, especially in an adverse society and education system.

---

[4] https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/education-celebration-2022-dig/digital-exhibition?authuser=5
[5] Existing Data Source 02

Student's Union & University Relationship :

The University keenly invests in the SU, valuing the holistic provision this affords to students' education and progression. The elected seven full-time and six part-time Officers, along with Faculty Rep Facilitators (paid students) and support staff, work together to drive institutional change to their educational environment; amplifying the voice of our 1,000 Academic Reps and 30,000 members. Officers hold regular SU Forums, open to all students to attend and make change, plus attend SU Council; made up of departmental and representative councillors as well as working committees. The University encourages our representative role as critical friend and collaborator through continual development of Partnership Boards, Officer seats at key committees and chairing co-created steering groups - such as the active Decolonisation: Community Group.

SECTION 1: DATA COLLECTION

Challenges & Gaps :

The SU was able to access some of the University's internal data on request, as well as use the publicly-available dashboards. However, this meant data mining was atomised. Going forward, we therefore eagerly encourage comprehensive access and sharing of all internal data sets between the organisations for the benefit of our shared members/students. Our ambition to represent a diversity of student experiences at scale was a challenge: the University was unable to share data of underrepresented students as population sizes were too small for data to be either collected or shared externally - 'departmental EDI data is suppressed'. We know the Black and Asian awarding gap has positively moved from 17% and 19% to 7% and 4% respectively[6] - University investment into why this is occurring (and for all underrepresented) is needed in order to proactively shape an inclusive and equitable education. We also need data on the reasons behind non-completion. The SU does not currently have access to 'TellUs' data: student feedback from every course module. We therefore collected our own, new and in-depth qualitative data through interviews and forums to understand the diverse experiences of students.[7] We look forward to closer data collection of our student communities so we can support our students' intersectional experience.

Data Collection: Existing Sources		
No	*Date, Process, Representation and Rationale of Data Collection*	*Sample*
01	<u>*2022 NSS Data:*</u> *Extensive dataset analysed with support from Alterline who produced demographic summary reports revealing intersectional perspective. 69% response rate.*	3057
02	<u>2021/22 SU Student Experience Survey:</u> *Good 11% response rate. Women and international students are overrepresented. Ethnicity, full/part time is proportional to the student body's demographics. 16% disabled; 20% mature; 10% commuter respondents.*	3297
03	<u>2022 Careers & SU Survey on Sustainable Future of Careers:</u> *Sent to all students.*	666
04	<u>2021-2022 Ours For Life - SU Strategy Annual Survey</u> *Students satisfaction scores using SUs strategic goals: My Academic life (B2), My Social Life, My Place in the World, My Everyday Life, The Rest of My Life (B3 Progression) as well as recording of Volunteering activities and student impact.*	3000
Data Collection: New Sources		
05	<u>2022 SU Survey: Assessment and Feedback</u>: *Likert Scale-focussed survey with open text*	130

---

[6] Point 9 in the University's submission
[7] We were unable to collect representative data from our apprenticeship courses.

	that we developed for TEF - sent to all Academic Reps with additional responses collected in-person, across each faculty as direct outreach across campus.	
06	2022 SU Forums (Academic, Liberation & International): *We utilised the new, democratic SU Forums to host TEF roundtables and collect data on the student experience through deliberative discussion. Student reps from every faculty attended Academic Forum while Liberation Forum was attended by Mature, Women, LGBTQ+, Disabled and BAME students. 35 International students across all faculties were asked about academic support at International Network; led by our International Officer.*	150
07	2022 SU Interviews with Liberation Panel: *Semi-structured, one-hour interviews with student leaders belonging to different representative committees, courses and years in order to collect a deeper and intersectional understanding of student experience. Each interviewee was chosen as they are engaged in biweekly discussion with underrepresented student groups: Mature, International, LGBTQ+, Disabled, BAME, Woman. They will be tagged in the footnotes.*	
08	2022 Student-Staff Committee (SSCs) Themes: *Rep Facilitators (x2 paid student-staff *per faculty*) attend and minute each SSC in their associated faculty - emerging themes have been used to inform the submission from the current students' experiences*.	25 meetings
09	2022 SU Survey: Skills and 'Your Education Experience': *Open-text survey to collect students' qualitative experiences of education and skill development. Respondents are from a diversity of societies, faculties and identities: international, neurodiverse, non-binary, parent, disabled, mature, queer, mixed race. Faculty mix: 2% Arts; 14% Engineering; 17% Medicine Dentistry & Health; 26% Science; 41% Social Science.*	42

The student experience from these data sources have been drawn together to create the report that follows.

SECTION 2: STUDENT EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

1.) Assessment and Feedback (including Academic Support) :

The University Programme Level Approach (PLA), which we welcome, seeks to design programmes from the student perspective: 'providing authentic, inclusive, proportionate and distributed assessment and feedback opportunities'. In the survey involving 130 respondents[9], over half reported positive experiences about staff approachability (79%), confidence in assessment preparation (70%) and feedback timeliness (66%). However, open-text responses called for more personalised, iterative feedback to better guide students - with low-stake, formative opportunities that support learning over grading. Liberation Panel interviewees requested more specialist language support, while Liberation Forum discussed wanting a choice of assessment mode, like the diversity offered in the pandemic, to be inclusive of disabled, neurodivergent, and every student.

● Strengths

Foundation Support: Mature students on Foundation and Department for Lifelong Learning (DLL) courses (smaller cohorts) describe their time very positively in our surveys and interviews, highlighting the enabling and progressive support they received from DLL.

---

[9] New Data Source 05

"My best teaching experience was during the foundation year – [it] brought a lot of richness to my teaching experience due to the interdisciplinary nature of the course, a mix of history, philosophy, and English."[10]

"The Academic Literacy and Communication Skills module in the foundation year has helped me to understand how to approach things academically. These skills have been transferable to other modules and assessments. I feel all areas of my learning are met and my tutors have supported me".[11]

Note *['Section 3']*: Completion rates for all programmes are generally positive, however, a notable outlier is the degree completion rates of students starting with Foundation. While continuation of Foundation year to Y1 is above benchmark, and students quote excellent experiences, the completion rate of their full degree is materially below benchmark by 77% (particularly mature and BME students). The SU are currently researching why. Mature students in Liberation Forum noted that academic support in larger cohorts is less personalised and wish for greater support to be retained to maintain equitable education provision for all backgrounds (completion for part time students is also low). From APP data, we also see the widest gap scored in disabled students with 4.8 variation between continuation and completion.

Central support services: 301 Academic Skills Centre, Maths And Statistics Help [MASH], Library, English Language Teaching Centre [ELTC], Dyslexia & Disability Support Services [DDSS] and the Students' Union Advice Centre were identified as very good spaces of support, from our survey.However, greater visibility of 301 is needed as only half of those in our Forums were aware, and ⅓ from our survey.[12] Liberation Forum[13] raised that DDSS provides a great service; one being Learning Support Plans (LSP), for equitability. Liberation Panel highlighted how LSP implementation at department level is inconsistent and sometimes not considered. A new DDSS, Student Support initiative, fully rolling out across the institution in 2023, is designed to resolve this, ensuring all staff are aware. Neurodivergent support groups and paid disability champions provide community support. International students report that it is difficult to overcome their stigma and accept that you need an LSP[14]

- **Challenges**

Learnings from covid - inclusive adjustments: Representatives at our Academic Forum expressed how they valued (and now miss) the adjustments and diverse changes made during the pandemic, which induced a more inclusive, decolonis(ing) and equitable experience. As part of this,open-book assessment, iterative feedback, collaboration and diverse formats were used. While there are localised innovations, these learnings have not been maintained across the university. If given the option, from our survey[15], 41% of students would choose an open book exam, 41% would choose an essay, and 31%[16] online assessment. Inclusive innovations support all students but, when they are reverted, it has a disproportionate impact on underrepresented groups[17]. We look forward to working with the University through the new, co-created Inclusive Curriculum group to resume this focus.

"I wrote 4 essays in Philosophy - I chose one to rewrite and submit, it would get remarked and given more feedback! It promoted a learning community and was less stressful. The individualistic education system promotes competition and perfection; there is a vicious cycle of negative wellbeing which we need to undo. I haven't had this opportunity since."[18]

"Seminars should be recorded in some way incase you miss one - they tend to be the most helpful but the

---

[10] New Data Source 07:
[11] New Data Source 09:
[12] New Data Source 09
[13] New Data Source 06
[14] New Data Source 07: P4 [Engineering, International student]
[15] New Data Source 05: 130 Respondents across all faculties.
[16] Respondents could have more than one choice in their reply
[17] https://wonkhe.com/blogs/changes-to-teaching-and-assessment-are-reducing-awarding-gaps/
https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/bame-awarding-gap-shrinks-under-flexible-covid-marking-policies
[18] New Data Source 06: Participant at an Academic Forum discussion

hardest to catch up on" [Geography student]

"We need to diversify more. I have enjoyed diversity in assessment methods and modules when the lecturer has widened their sources, decolonising their work and addressing where gaps are within the social context of what they teach."[19]

Seeking personalised, detailed and clear feedback to guide students for continuation: Our survey[20] told us 61% felt their feedback was helpful, 18% disagreed and 18% were unsure - with some mentioning that feedback came after their next assessment was already submitted. A common theme from the survey was the request for more open drop-ins to scaffold a discussion around your work in progress; as well as after submission. Large cohorts, such as in Psychology, reported receiving generalised, whole-cohort feedback to an assessment - indicating a poor student-staff ratio and subsequent workload issue - inhibiting student development.

"More in-depth feedback rather than generalised e.g. instead of 'structure could be clearer' explain how it could be clearer" [Student quote from survey - this was a high frequency theme]

Subject specific language support and Assessment Literacy for International Students: while the ELTC is available, students at our International Network forum still expressed a need for greater language support as well as transitional guidance about education culture in the UK as they reported struggling. Local innovations to foster assessment literacy in a safe space - such as in the Education department, where staff organised a mock exam hall, are excellent to see. More innovations like these are needed institutionally, especially as Sheffield considers itself an 'International University'. Notably, our Advice Centre receives a disproportionate number of Academic Appeals from international students[21].

"Support is not adequate for [international] students. There is an assumption that you have a certain level of English so you must understand everything but I have never studied physics in English. We were just left in the same room with home students and got the same information - no time to adjust. I understand that independent learning is a big thing but ELTC is mostly about academic writing, not engineering."[22]

"To me a good university is somewhere I feel supported and comfortable - and I have found that in Sheffield. But Sheffield often offers more than it can currently support - e.g we offer places to students whose language levels are low and they struggle. With disability, the Uni should of course never deny a space, but it is on them to give everyone an equitable experience - you can't give people the same thing and expect the same outcome."[23]

Centralising Wellbeing as Foundational: interviewees from the Liberation Panel acknowledged the new Academic Tutor pilot and Faculty Wellbeing Advisors, but called for greater resourcing and recognition of wellbeing within curricular workloads and ways of working. We also understand The Law School is working on changing the culture of wellbeing through co-creation projects.

"I just don't think there is enough emphasis on taking care of yourselves and prioritising things so you would the entire education system that perpetuates this. Academic support is very much academic, grades, results. But, in order to get these results, you need to recognise that students are human beings as much as staff are people. That seems to be a failure of the whole system."[24]

---

[19] New Data Source 07:
[20] New Data Source 05
[21] Student Advice Centre Service Use Data, Student Advice Centre Tracker + conversations with Advice Staff
[22] New Data Source 07: P4
[23] New Data Source 07: P6
[24] New Data Source 07: P2

2.) Do Students' feel their Voice is Valued?

[Graph: *Alterline analysis of UoS NSS trends 2019-22*]

The University outlines that "students are involved in every stage of how we design, deliver, review and improve our academic programmes and the wider student experience."[25] Several of those ways are in partnership with the SU through Officers influencing University committees. The Academic Rep system ensures students are recruited, trained and supported by the SU to be effective Reps - attending Student-Staff Committees for each programme and faculty. In 2021, 1,123 Reps were upskilled on public speaking, diverse data capture and facilitator training. NSS tells us that while students report that they have the opportunity to 'feedback', they often feel their voice is not valued; they can not see where their involvement made a difference; or, when the ask becomes too meaningfully complex, the systems stall.

Change over time in the combined scales, excluding those who selected 'Not applicable'.

Legend:
- The teaching on my course
- Assessment and feedback
- Organisation and management
- Learning community
- Learning opportunities
- Academic support
- Learning resources
- Student voice

● Strengths

We are keen to see co-creation become part of a wider governance model at multiple levels in a more visible, distributed and accessible way to the student body to resolve the declining, but still above benchmark, trend. A Student Voice Special Interest Group, set up by Academic Programmes and Student Experience along with the SU, has involved productive cross-faculty discussion about best practices (particularly from Engineering, Biomedical Science and Journalism) with high engagement and a mindset of improvement. The group has suggested greater staff resourcing for student voice across both organisations, considering rep remuneration strategies, greater distribution of student representatives on decision-making working groups (increasing their student-facing visibility) as well as supporting an inclusive culture of capturing ambient student voice on the 'everyday'. In the SU, to minimise barriers to engagement, we have hosted new, regular Academic, Liberation and International Forums - deliberative spaces that any student is able to attend for a diversity of student voices to be heard.

● Challenges

Students on the Liberation Panel reflected some of the challenges. Students apprehensively rate the actual ability to transform the curriculum at 6.4/10.[26]

"It shouldn't be the case that only Officers know about how the services work in the University. Students don't really get a chance to say ok, this is what we would like to see more of…it is difficult for a student who is not highly involved in SU work, to access and have their say in University spaces. I feel like the University wants to engage students' voices but does not do it effectively. They want students to be involved but want quantitative data as opposed to qualitative data."[27]

"The people I am least likely to come forward to are probably the people that should be listened to the most. It is about creating safe spaces where people feel comfortable to come forward and by actively reaching out to those students. There needs to be more emphasis in making sure that International Students have their voices properly heard - don't put the onus on them"[28]

---
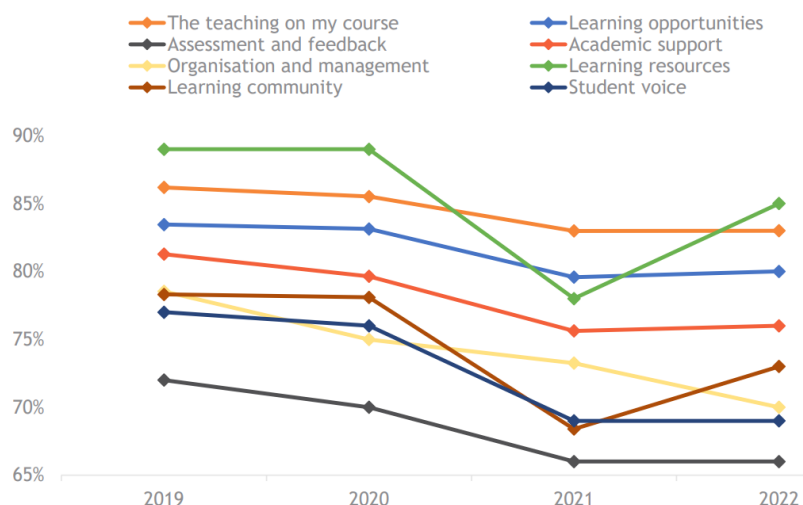
[25] Paragraph 78 in the University's TEF 2023 submission
[26] Existing Data Source 04
[27] New Data Source 07: P2
[28] New Data Source 07: P3

"My cohort's voice was ignored by our department in relation to us having to take our first in-person exam since GCSEs in a module that we have lost 1/2 of because of strikes" [Biomedical, International student]

3.) Belonging to a Learning Community

Conversations with students at Forums and through Liberation Panel drew out themes of needing community - understanding that peer support, staff familiarity and a sense of social belonging is a precondition for a student's positive education and progression experience - as well as tackling loneliness. While students on the Liberation Panel emphasised how 'welcoming' Sheffield is, they expressed the sense of belonging that they had found from their SU activities (which the University invests in) is not mirrored on their course. The NSS and our surveys[29] demonstrate that learning community scores are above benchmark at Sheffield, but there is some variation with department and demographic. Accordingly, the University has an upcoming 'Building Community' institutional event to share best practices; Officers are also involved in inclusive study spaces and wayfinding projects in collaboration with creative faculty staff at the University. Trans and nonbinary students noted how they appreciate staff who normalise pronouns.

● Strengths

The University invests in the SU, valuing the social connections, peer mentorship and skills students receive from academic societies, activities and sports. A third of Sheffield students are actively engaged in the 300+ societies. Our Global Opportunities scheme provides orientation weeks, which supports international students in particular to establish a sense of belonging. We believe a key aspect of induction should be to create social capital and connection across all cohorts; fettering competition and isolation in favour of community and peer support. Third spaces such as the Diamond, Information Commons (IC) and SU are frequently celebrated in our research[30] - students highly value these common spaces to collaborate, study and socially learn. Academic societies like BAME Engineers are also pivotal communities of student-led mentorship and education. Architecture Society [SUAS] and MedSoc are particularly strong and student-led, including through student voice and career progression:

"Medsoc feels like an amazing academic society! They typically provide academic and career advice. From day one, they provide your equipment for dissection and discount cards. They give intro lectures to give you insight into how that year will work and make great socials throughout the year. Surprisingly, they also make the mock papers and exams for us as well (rather than the medical school)! They directly talk to staff in the department and for students, your first point of contact for help would be your Phase (year) Rep."

"It is the luckiest choice in my life to come to Sheffield just because if I didn't have the SU side, I would be miserable. It really diversified my life by being part of SU - providing a big community aspect and that's how I found all my friends."[31]

● Challenges

Students in Law and Psychology report lower levels of learning community (NSS), which is consistent with our conversations with students. Liberation Forum noted how limited contact hours and unvaried ways of learning foster isolated and 'competitive' experiences in the larger cohorts. Demographically, students with a disability, from a mixed ethnic background or in IMD q1/2 also score lower levels of belonging.

It is difficult to really get to know people on my course with relatively little opportunity to interact with other students. [Law student]. There is lots of space for students to study - I only really socialise with housemates/societies. I barely know anyone on my course [Psychology student].[32]

---

[29] New Data Source 09
[30] New Data Source 09
[31] New Data Source 07: P4
[32] New Data Source 09

"Specifically on my course there is intense pressure and I I don't know how people are doing. I often disengage and the emails I receive are not compassionate; they are warning-like"[33]

Disabled students at Forum noted that the emails they receive when absent are intimidating; in some cases losing marks if not responding in time:

"Needing adjustments compared to peers can feel isolating - if the uni is designed for the most disadvantaged students, it would include everybody - an institution would feel ready for you, it won't see you as extra work. Any options to foster solidarity and community - e.g. the Sunflower lanyard scheme [now adopted] forges a solidarity belief system that staff want to help students; and we are doing our best"[34]

Markedly, an International Councillor expressed that more facilitated support and community-building, in-curricular, not just by the SU, is required[35] - a theme mentioned throughout our data sources.

"'Global competence' and 'cultural intelligence' are part of the Sheffield Graduate Attributes (SGAs) - this ambition is great, and it is hard to challenge an institution we view with prestige, but I don't think that is what a UoS graduate automatically gets within their program. Having to reflect on our SGAs after a group assessment feels tickbox because the assessment is done in conditions that don't enable their exploration - we are just stressed doing it. To be meaningful, programs should framework low-stress opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds, tackling bias and building a foundation of community; prior to any assessment; supporting cohorts to interact "

Liberation Panel interviews indicated how students enjoy interdisciplinary opportunities, calling for more:
*"I think for me the belonging piece is missing. Currently, we have very separate faculties. It is like having a body with all pieces separate; it is not connected yet. There are no nerves - this is the life that is needed for **the connection** – and to feel at home here."[36]*
"Optional modules and the encouragement to explore outside of your discipline is great. I have enjoyed diversity in assessment methods and in modules where the lecturer has put thought into widening resources; decolonising work and addressing where and why gaps exist within the social context of what they teach. This is not yet consistent across my experience."[37]

SECTION 3: STUDENT OUTCOMES
> The importance of social capital, community experiences and support for equitability.
Continuation and Completion have been discussed above. Progression, in terms of opportunities for holistic skill and personal development in-curricular as well as co-curricular, is discussed below.

MySkills is a tool to report and reflect on the skills students have gained (scaffolded on Sheffield Graduate Attributes). While 72%[38] have heard of it, 42% use it. Positively, 85% felt their course provided skills for the future, although 'uncertainty' featured as a frequent theme in our SU survey[39]. While some students say their course has honed their studying skills and has demanded a lot of 'independence'[40], not necessarily a positive, it is in the co-curricular opportunities where their development has positively accelerated:

"From my background, going to Uni is like a life and death situation, you work hard and as a result, everything gets better. In reality, it is incredibly difficult to get a job. So, with the social aspect - belonging and societies - this is where you can find out who you are, and that is a very unique and powerful thing."[41]

---

[33] New Data Source 07: P5
[34] New Data Source 07: P6
[35] New Data Source 07: P4
[36] New Data Source 07: P2
[37] New Data Source 07: P6
[38] Existing Data Source 03
[39] Existing Data Source 02
[40] New Data Source 09: High frequency theme: 'independence'
[41] New Data Source 07:

"The SU provides a lot of flexibility in exploring a prospective career, even diversifying students studying STEM subjects, into students with better people skills, considering the world is not just about science."[42]

Experiencing enriching and meaningful skills development is needed to compel students to reflect on MySkills. Thus, the SU, extensively supported by the University, offers a huge diversity of activities: democratic, voluntary (students volunteered 33,496 hours in 2022), paid placements, flexible jobs (519 student-staff) and committee competency training. 30% of Sheffield students belong to societies. In 2022, 1,504 students attended risk management, facilitation and leadership training. Students are encouraged to 'Give it a Go', a programme of diverse extracurricular activities running throughout the year. The development of confidence, social capital, caring mentorship and challenging existing ways of thinking is essential in supporting students' progression beyond University in flexible, fun and agile ways!

Changelab, an SU programme facilitating, mentoring and supporting students to run meaningful, social justice projects, is a great example. Project Leaders (students) have developed civic skills in 'campaigning; advocacy; teamwork; organisation; project scope & management; learning from the team; flexibility; reflecting on challenges and adjusting'. Paired with a mentor (an experienced campaigner) and offered Changemaking 101 workshops, students feel empowered and supported. Meanwhile Project Leaders, often final year students, peer support the first years in their group - generating a vertical cycle of important social capital. *"On reflection, I have learnt that how things are taught in university may not necessarily work that way in real life and sometimes you have to think creatively about how to apply your academic knowledge to community work."* [Changelab Student: Project Leader]

However, we know that volunteering is a privilege and so we also believe in-curricular opportunities, such as the Transforming & Activating Places [TAP] scheme, should be sustainably integrated into all programmes. Low confidence and imposter syndrome in academic and/or workplace settings are common barriers to entry and progression for underrepresented students, so the pre-internship workshops, payment and wrap-around mentorship provided by the TAP team is essential and exemplifies equitability. Students say:
- *"I have personal mental health struggles that I worry will cause setbacks with my internship. However, I think the **sessions on imposter syndrome** will really help with this, and I want to push myself to be confident and trust the process."*
- *"It also has helped show that I am able to lead more and **work in a team that believes in me** and sees my opinions as **valuable**"*
- *"Attending the University of Sheffield and attaining an internship is statistically unlikely for someone from my background. The TAP programme **facilitated an opportunity that society inhibits.**"*
- *"Being from a WP background means **I don't have the funding or contacts to pull in favours** and ask for experience and help **so programmes like this are really vital** and have helped me secure valuable work experience"*

We would like to see this great level of investment and care continue for all students across all faculties.
"I would love to see the university as a whole do more to support disabled students after university. I am autistic and I am terrified to start job hunting - I cannot find anything that would specifically help me and people like me."

Concluding:

We know our students are satisfied overall but experiences are not homogenous, so we asked; with what, where and how? Our preparatory aim was to review TEF indicators, interrogate any barriers to excellent education experience and capture student experiences that may fall through the existing statistics gaps. We look forward to the institution investing in closer data collection of our intersectional student community to support them. It has been a reflective co-learning process highlighting data gaps, where greater sharing is required and gathering fresh insight from qualitative and outreach enquiry. Venues to action that will make the education experience more inclusive, well-being centred, exploratory, interdisciplinary and equitable were foregrounded. Skill development integration that provides support and social connection has been successful locally; and we look forward to its sustainable expansion within Sheffield's education culture.

---

[42] New Data Source 07: P4