Teaching Excellence Framework 2023

Student Submission

Provider: Northeastern University London

Section 1 Approach to evidence gathering

We have catered our evidence gathering approach to the unique circumstances of our small Humanities university. Due to our low student numbers and high course options any quantitative evidence we would be able to gather would be of a small sample size and hence, not reliable. The University follows a major/minor course structure where most students take one major subject and one minor subject. Some specific courses such as PPE have two minors and Law has a single honours option. The University offers 10 possible choices for both major and minor. We have amalgamated whether students are a major or minor for the analysis in this report. In order to gather detailed evidence about student experience and outcomes on all of our courses, we chose to pursue a qualitative data gathering approach. We conducted one-to-one interviews with both Student Representatives and volunteer students. Members of our team asked the students a variety of questions regarding their major course, minor course and student life. The interviewers recorded the answers in long-form format to capture the student's responses in high level detail.

In the data analysis stage of the process, the responses from students were sorted by relevance and sentiment. The responses with the most valuable information, irrespective of sentiment were then used as the basis of this report. Shorter, less qualitatively valuable responses, were used to back up these claims based on their sentiment and occurrence.

Little to no data sorting was required as the interviews themselves were already separated into sections containing questions related to a specific area of the student experience, academic or otherwise. These sections were designed in such a way as to make their responses relevant to one of the indicators this report focuses on.

Another strength of this approach was the ability for the interviewers to ask further supporting questions. Some sample questions had been pre-written if interviewees'

responses ended up too short, but more often questions related to the theme of the section. This allowed for much more in-depth evidence gathering. Some of the most impactful quotes from students came from further conversation related to the initial question, rather than the first response. Such data would have been impossible to gather by simply sending out a survey for students to fill out. Interviewing eager volunteers proved to be highly effective. This allowed us to mitigate some of the issues stemming from our low sample size.

The majority of those interviewed are Student Representatives. This is a faculty position, whereby one student from each year group in each faculty is elected by their peers to represent their views about the course. The exact distribution of students interviewed is as follows:

Level/Type	Politics	Philosophy	Economics	Law	English Literature
L4	2	2	1	2	0
L5	2	1	1	1	1
L6	2	2	2	1	0
Total	**6**	**5**	**4**	**4**	**1**

Level/Type	History	Data Science	Psychology	Creative Writing	Art History
L4	1	1	1	1	0
L5	0	1	1	0	0
L6	1	1	0	0	0
Total	**2**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**

Data Science, Psychology, Creative Writing and Art History have historically been minor subjects, therefore with less students. The University has 324 undergraduate students. In total we interviewed 18 students; 5.6% of the student population. These students were typically able to comment on two faculties - their major and minor disciplines.

Ultimately the approach to evidence gathering was heavily influenced by the reality of a small student population. The evidence that was gathered is of high quality and has allowed for a deep analysis of the various indicators this approach was tailored to explore.

Section 2   Evidence about the student experience

Typically, students are very satisfied with their experience of teaching and learning at Northeastern University London. In our data collection, they particularly emphasised the growth of their academic understanding through the tutorial and formative assessment system. They also commented on the small-class size and the positive impact this has on their experience of lectures and seminars; improving their comprehension of course material. It is clear that this highly personalised learning environment benefits all students.

Students are also encouraged to voice their opinions on the courses through utilising Student Representatives and their own individual engagement with lecturers. The relationship between students and faculty means that students can directly positively influence their courses, increasing their learning. Those interviewed also noted the different accommodations made for students and the personal stance lecturers take to teaching, meaning that classes are catered to the students in it.

There was some negative feedback, particularly regarding a lack of library resources and some individual courses, all of which is detailed in this section.

SE1:   How well teaching, feedback and assessment practices support students' learning, progression, and attainment

For indicator SE1, we asked students about their experience of teaching in lectures, seminars and tutorials. Lecture classes are around 20 students to a class, seminars are smaller groups of about 10 and tutorials are either one-to-one or two-to-one. We also asked about experience with formative and summative assessments: their scheduling; speed of feedback; and quality of feedback.

Lectures

Typically, teaching in lectures was found to be a positive experience. Economics students noted that lectures are engaging and the content is explained clearly and in good order. The only concern noted for Economics was that 15-credit courses ending in December are not examined until May, which proved to be a long break between content and assessment in AY 2021/2022.   Politics and International Relations students had a generally positive experience, with only one concern noting that lectures sometimes had lack of clarity and weren't interactive. However, a Level 4 student said that lectures were very collaborative. This qualitative data is in line with the TEF indicators for teaching and learning.

Despite mainly positive feedback, Law and Philosophy had higher levels of negative feedback. Law students commented on the difference in lecture pedagogy between faculty. A Level 6 student commented that one lecturer uses content-heavy slide decks, and another gives limited resources which means students find it difficult to understand the lecture material. This is less in-line with expectations, given Law and Philosophy are 6.6 and 2.4 percentage points (respectively) above the TEF benchmark for teaching and learning.

The University is currently placing a package of improvement for teaching by seeking AdvanceHE Fellowship for faculty without a teaching qualification. This will aim to improve the student learning experience in the instances where they are unsatisfied with teaching.

Seminars

Feedback with relation to seminars was mixed. Politics and International Relations students have found that seminars are too content-heavy which limits their ability to understand the readings and therefore participate in the seminar.

However, Economics students have found that the seminars are generally engaging. Based on the interviews, pre-work appears to be less for Economics, with more emphasis on depth of discussion than pre-reading. One student noted that "the facilitation of these seminars have been a safe space and a good place to ask for clarification". Similarly, a Level 4 History student commented that the instructions for seminar work are clear and a place for discussion both with classmates in small groups and then with the lecturer as a whole group. Positively, most of the students from all subjects and year groups shared the sentiment that seminars are beneficial in increasing their understanding of course work and are an easy place to ask for clarification on lecture work.

Tutorials and Formative Assessment

Experience of tutorials was also mixed. Mostly, students are happy with the positive learning experience they bring. They are an opportunity to explore an essay question in detail, and receive useful feedback about understanding and essay style before summative submissions. Notably, students were very satisfied with the development opportunity formative assessment (through tutorials) brings, commenting that they use feedback to support their next essays and summatives.

Despite this, the experience varied across subjects with Politics and International Relations students noting that there is not a consistent style of feedback. Some faculty give detailed written feedback, while others give general verbal feedback in the tutorial which, being less personalised, doesn't help as much. Students also expressed that they found the often-late scheduling of tutorials hindered their ability to adequately prepare. No comments were made about the topics chosen for formative questions, which we believe indicates that the questions are what students expect to be answering in these questions.

Summative Assessment

With regard to summative assessment, students commented that they found they are typically scheduled well, and it is clear when the assessment is due. However, some students responded that they have found them to be scheduled too close together and suggested that faculty should liaise on deadlines to ensure this does not happen.

Students were mainly happy with the quality of summative assessment feedback, noting that it is detailed and easy to follow. However, there were comments about the negative tone of feedback, and that it does not feed back enough positive information, even when receiving a First Class. Most students felt that summative feedback was returned within the University policy of 28 days. However, it is worth commenting that there were notable delays in the return of assessments in the Hilary summative period and examination period of 2022. To rectify this, changes in policy surrounding how the University internally sets deadlines for summatives and increases in Registry staff were made.

The interviews responses about formative and summative assessment are broadly in-line with the TEF indicator for assessment and feedback, which is 12.9 percentage points above the benchmark.

SE2:   How well course content and delivery engages students in their learning, and stretches students to develop their knowledge and skills

For indicator SE2 we asked students about the content of their course, the reading lists provided to support them in their learning and how these combine to develop their knowledge and skills. We did not ask about their experience of combining two disciplines through the major/minor system, which we do believe is a positive attribute of learning at NULondon.

Economics students in all levels found the content of their course to be of good difficulty. They commented that most modules are engaging and that they feel they have been taught what was advertised. An Economics minor student interviewed also noted that they are glad to have less maths and more theoretical modules to complement their major humanities subjects. Economics students were also satisfied with the reading lists and pre-work. They said that it laid a good foundation of knowledge for class work and assessments.

Law students were happy with the course content. It is prescribed by the government, to make it a qualifying Law degree, and therefore they study all essential modules. They said

that the case studies used are always up-to-date and that the course is sufficiently challenging, with pre-work preparing them well for lecture content.

Only one English student was engaged in the data collection. They did however note that they enjoy the flexible content of the degree. However, this student did note concerns with the lack of provision of texts and that these can be expensive to buy for each module.

Only one History student was involved in the data, but they noted their enjoyment of the course so far. They said "World History has given me a totally new perspective on early history". This student was also satisfied with their reading lists, and that these sufficiently support them in research for their classes.

However, Politics and International Relations students noted concern on the content. The Level 4 student gave concerns that the course content is not taught in enough detail. This concern was shared by the Level 5 and 6 students as well. The Level 6 student states that they would also like to be taught more practical understanding of the industry, rather than only its academic nature. These students also shared concern about the intensive nature of the reading lists and how time-consuming it was to complete work for Politics modules.

Philosophy students also gave concerns about the lack of breadth across the degree. The Level 6 students thought that there could be more optional modules, specifically with more options to study the practical / ethical side to Philosophy, rather than its analytical side. At the moment, the degree courses for Philosophy are fairly prescriptive, for both major and minor students. Students were satisfied with the reading lists, and agree that they develop their understanding of lecture content.

With regard to course reading lists and pre-work, the Data Science student was satisfied with the breadth and depth of reading.

Overall, course content is generally approved of by students. They are satisfied with the pre-work and reading lists given for courses. However, for some disciplines (Politics /International Relations, Philosophy) there have been concerns raised about the breadth of content.

SE5: How supportive the learning environment is, and how far students can access the academic support they need

For indicator SE5 we asked students about their experience engaging with faculty and University welfare resources.

Overall there was no concern raised about engagement with faculty, except for the Law faculty.

Students across most faculties made comments of the following grain:

- "Faculty are very open, clarified to us that they are there to help";
- "Very responsive over email, easy to ask questions";
- "All are very supportive and easy to approach as well as having a deep knowledge of their subject matter";
- "Good at creating socials [to build relationships]";
- "Allow students to question and give good feedback to reflect on";
- "Clear Canvas (the University VLE) to use"
- "Take on feedback to improve the course"

From these responses we can see that the learning environment for students is supportive and that they feel comfortable accessing the support they need from faculty. Law students did, however, raise concerns about their faculty. The previous term (September-December) had a change in Head of Faculty for Law and a lecturer who was not in the country. This meant that students felt their learning was impeded and the speed of response from faculty was unsatisfactory.

The TEF indicator for student voice is 9.2 percentage points above the benchmark, and academic support is 10.3 above. This is generally reflected in the interviews we conducted.

With regard to interaction with University welfare resources students mostly responded that they are helpful and resourceful. Though, there were multiple instances of students thinking that the resources available to support them from the Student Support and Development (SSD) team could be made more clear, and that more students would engage with them if they knew the support available. A particular issue was raised by multiple students about the lack of support available regarding housing. The Student Union has been in conversation with the SSD team and we think more work needs to be done to support students in this area. Lack of stable housing negatively impacts students' ability to learn and participate in academic activities.

SE6: How well physical and virtual learning resources support teaching and learning

For indicator SE6 we asked students about their experience with online and physical library resources.

Typically, students were satisfied with online library resources. These are provided through the Northeastern Virtual Library and other subscriptions, such as Cambridge Core and JSTOR. Students noted that the virtual library gave adequate substance to conduct research for formative and summative assignments. Law students were, however, broadly unsatisfied, because the Northeastern library is catered to US Law, rather than UK. The university has expanded the Law texts available to students through providing subscriptions to Westlaw and Lexis+.

Students were unsatisfied with the on-site library resource and other physical library accesses. They raised concerns about not being able to find texts in the on-site library and that the other libraries available were not accessible enough to campus. The university has employed a Library Officer to begin expanding the collection to make on-site resources useful and accessible to students.

SE7: How well the university or college engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students

For indicator SE7 we asked students about their experiences as Student Representatives, the role of the Student Union and their views on whether staff value student feedback.

Student Representatives felt similarly to other students in that faculty respond well to feedback and want to support students. They said that they are typically used to provide feedback about courses, increase access to lecturers and clear confusion over deadlines. However, they also responded that students don't seem to use them too much and often go straight to lecturers with their own concerns. This supports the data collected above about students' interactions with their faculties. Overall, it seems that students feel comfortable speaking to faculty about improvements.

Student opinions on the Student Union is that more could be done to clarify what the SU can do academically. The consensus was that the SU is good for student life and building a sense of community, but it is unclear what else they can do. Work is already being done by the SU to improve this aspect of their provision; to improve advocacy for students.

Section 3   Evidence about student outcomes

The progression to Higher Education is a big step up. We think that in order to produce the best outcomes for students, Northeastern University London should focus on a wide range of support to develop students' academic and personal abilities, making them brilliant candidates once they leave the institution. Our data shows that NULondon runs a number of projects that set out to improve students abilities in these areas while making them as attractive as possible to future employers and further education. However, there is much more they could do in the extra-curricular space and often, the resources they already provide are under-utilised due to a lack of interest or knowledge from students.

Careers support is crucial to give everyone studying at NULondon all the tools to succeed in their chosen industries. For the majority of the students we interviewed, the University has been incredibly helpful in providing a range of resources, such as CV grading software and practice interview opportunities, often conducted by industry professionals. Questions regarding the Law careers support were met with mixed opinion. Some students praised the attempt to provide dedicated support for Law applications, an industry with unique processes. However, other students raised concern that with only one lecturer for Law career support, there is little variation in advice.

The unique LauNCH programme that the University runs provides all students, no matter how little they interact with careers support, important development opportunities in teamwork, presenting and writing. This programme has been praised by students interviewed as making them "much better prepared than peers at other universities". However, there were others noting that their peers do not take the programme seriously. Despite this, and potentially in spite of the LauNCH programme, all TEF indicators on progression fall well above the benchmark in graduate level employment or postgraduate education for NULondon. Some student representatives pointed out in their feedback that LauNCH material was more focused on some industries than others, particularly the startup space. As NULondon continues its rapid growth in student numbers and increases the breadth of courses offered, in order to continue its great performance in Progression outcomes our data shows that support in fields such as STEM should be implemented as soon as possible. Moreover, to foster an environment where students can learn off each other in their specific pursuits and focus on their area of interest, career groups would benefit from being organised by sector.

A comprehensive mix of opportunities outside of the classroom, from sports to societies, are crucial in providing students a space to wind-down, broaden their horizons, build friendships and feel part of a community. As such, provision of extra-curricular activities should be seen as an integral tool in improving student continuation and completion. Our data shows that many students appreciate the breadth of societies that are available to them. However, despite high engagement amongst the Student Representatives we interviewed, many of

them noted that overall participation from the student population is low with society events. This suggests that students are unaware of opportunities on offer, or that those on offer do not meet their interests.

Our interview data suggests there is a consensus that sport opportunities are too few and poorly communicated to students who are not already integrated into a team. Sport opportunities have the potential to be a highlight of student university experience; contributing to continuation and completion. We feel that shortcomings in this area should be urgently addressed.

Improving TEF indicators in Continuation and Completion show that the increase in the number of sport and society opportunities are having a positive effect. However, to further improve the University's results in these areas, our data suggest more resources should be allocated into providing a larger number of better quality society and sport opportunities to students that meet a diverse range of interests. It is being investigated by the University to expand sport and society choices, as they recognise the importance of this to academic success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there has been strong qualitative evidence to suggest Northeastern University London provides a challenging and beneficial learning environment for students. Teaching is generally satisfying to students, and the digital learning resources are seen positively. Students are unsatisfied with on-site library resources and some aspects of degree content. However, strides are being taken by the University to improve these.