



**University of Manchester Students' Union**  
**Teaching Excellence Framework Student Submission**  
**January 2023**

**Introduction**

The writing of this student submission has been led by the Union Affairs Officer of the Students' Union. The role of Union Affairs Officer is one of eight full-time elected sabbatical roles within the Union and a key representative role for our students. As one of the lead student representatives for the Union, our Union Affairs Officer is the Chair of the Board of Trustees at the Students' Union and a Governor of the University. This submission has been created in partnership with our three Faculty Education Officers and uses a wide range of data from our student body, a significant amount of which was collated specifically for the submission. Our 2021-22 Education Officer inputted on the research stage of the submission plan, and support for the submission has been provided throughout by Students' Union staff.

The University have been helpful in providing us with additional resources for our Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) work and through this we were able to employ a graduate intern to support us with our research. We were invited to join the University's TEF Working Group, where we were able to share our initial findings and draft reports when we wished. We have, however, maintained full autonomy when writing this submission, and the University have not attempted to unduly influence the content of the report.

**Method**

Our Student Submission has been informed by research conducted over the past twelve months and existing student feedback. Although the National Student Survey (NSS) has not been a significant part of our data review, it has been referenced where relevant. We have also referenced national data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

In this submission we include specific data and student feedback related to the University's three faculties: the Faculty of Humanities (HUMS); the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health (FBMH); and the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE). Where necessary, we also make reference to certain schools within those faculties, including the School of Biological Sciences (SBS), part of FBMH; the School of Engineering (SoE) and the School of Natural Sciences (SoNS), which belong to FSE; and schools within HUMS: the School of Education, Environment and Development (SEED), School of Arts, Languages and Culture (SALC), and the Alliance Manchester Business School (AMBS).

Although we recognise the importance of the specific experience of part-time undergraduate students at the University, due to the small number (60 students – 0.2% in 2021/22), we do not provide a breakdown of part-time student data in this submission. We do however hope to include this where relevant in future years.

#### **TEF Submission Specific Research:**

**‘Build Your MCR’ (BYMCR) Survey:** our largest piece of data gathering came through our BYMCR Survey, which was open in April-June 2022 and saw a total of 7324 responses from across the student body – a response rate of 14.67%. 5501 of these responses came from Undergraduate students and have therefore been used to inform this submission. 38% of the participants were from the HUMS, 33% were from FBMH, and 29% were from FSE. When using ‘Agree’ or ‘Agreement’ in the text below, we are referring to students who rated an aspect as ‘Excellent’ or ‘Good’.

**Data Street Team Feedback:** this research involved qualitative feedback from 387 students on campus in May and October 2022 and provided more precise feedback and suggestions from students that contextualised the quantitative data from the BYMCR survey.

**Alumni Survey:** in September-October 2022, 250 graduates of undergraduate courses participated in our Alumni Survey, answering questions about their learning outcomes and the effect that studying at the University of Manchester (UoM) had on their progression. This survey was developed in collaboration with UoM.

#### **Relevant General Students’ Union Research:**

**Learning, Research and Support Survey:** we put out a survey to students in October 2020 to find out about their University experience during the first few months of the pandemic. 3019 students responded to the survey.

**Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) Meeting Minutes:** our Academic Representatives (Academic Reps) participate in SSLC meetings on a regular basis during the academic year. In these meetings, they share feedback from their cohort with teaching staff, and minutes from these meetings are shared with the Students’ Union. The minutes from the academic year 2021/2022 were analysed and provided us with additional feedback on some topics. In total, we analysed over 354 comments related to undergraduates from over 50 meetings that were held by 30 different committees.

**Annual Review of Teaching and Learning (ARTL) Feedback:** nine Academic Reps from across the three faculties participated in the University’s ARTL on behalf of the students in their cohort, feeding back on the student experience for the 2021-22 academic year in October 2022.

**Student Focus Group with University Board of Governors:** in February 2022, 32 students from across the University met with members of the University Board of Governors to feedback their experiences as a student at UoM.

**School Forums:** we held School Forums in April 2022, where we asked Academic Reps about their learning outcomes and educational gain. 25 students attended the forums, representing students across the three faculties and most of our nine schools. 48% of the representatives were FSE students, 20% were from FBMH, and 32% were from HUMS.

**Faculty Forums:** we held two Faculty Forums in November 2021, at which 42 Academic Reps attended. Faculty Forums were also held for FSE and HUMS in November 2022. 71 Academic Reps

attended the sessions across both faculties, representing students from a variety of courses and year groups. Discussions were focussed on assessment and feedback, the cost-of-living crisis and University communications.

**Research and Insight Reports:** other data reports by our Research and Insight Team and student-led research projects were analysed and used as additional insight. This includes the Voice Out: Feedback from Black Students Report which was based on a focus group held in July 2020 with students representing 14 student groups. We have also included data from our Cost of Living Survey Report which was conducted and collated in October and November 2022. This survey received 5310 responses, 62% of which were from Undergraduates.

## **Student Experience**

In this section of the report, we are focusing on the following indicators: SE1; SE2; SE5; SE6 and SE7. The majority of our research and feedback from students was associated with things linked to one or more of these categories.

We recognise that there are pockets of excellence across the institution, and a strong desire by many to continually improve the student experience at UoM. The University are piloting a number of initiatives across the faculties, and we look forward to seeing them progress. We do, however, believe that the University needs to be more ambitious and committed at all levels to achieving a consistent, excellent experience for our students. As a large Russell Group institution, we expect a higher level of satisfaction from our students than our data and the national benchmarking data suggests.

We recognise that some improvements will take substantial time to implement across an institution of this size. Given this, we think that the University needs to look at the speed at which it is able to implement change, to ensure that across the board there are 'quick wins' for students to see the impact of their feedback where possible during their time at Manchester. We are committed to working in partnership with the University to achieve this in the coming months and years and welcome the University's decision to prioritise student voice in the year ahead.

## **Academic Experience and Assessment**

### **SE1 – How well teaching, feedback and assessment practices support students' learning, progression and attainment**

There have been a significant number of changes to teaching and assessment at UoM over the past few years, with Covid-19 causing the University to adapt its delivery methods. Though initially the majority of students expressed having difficulty with the transition to online learning, student satisfaction with online teaching and learning has improved since then. The University is now developing and implementing a long-term flexible learning strategy.

### **Teaching – In-Person and Online Learning**

Students have told us that they currently prefer in-person teaching to learning online. 66.52% of 5403 BYMCR survey participants agreed that in-person teaching at UoM is excellent, with students telling us through the Data Street Team that they found it to be more social, engaging and that the overall atmosphere feels more motivating. Satisfaction was particularly high amongst HUMS students, with an agreement rate of 74.54%. FSE and FBMH had much lower scores – 63.15% and 60.42% respectively. The difference in student opinion is significant between schools, with 79.22%

of students in SALC agreeing that in-person teaching is excellent, compared to 50.07% of students in the SBS. This speaks to a need for a more consistent approach across the institution.

49.15% of 5318 respondents in our BYMCR Survey agreed that online teaching is excellent – more than 17% less than those who agreed in-person teaching is excellent. Satisfaction amongst international students was slightly higher at 51.89% (n = 1480). This has, however, increased from the early stages of the pandemic when satisfaction with online learning was much lower – for example only 37.8% of students surveyed in our Learning, Research and Support Survey said they were satisfied with online learning materials (n = 2915). Those who did show a preference for online learning through our Data Street Teams fed back that it provided more flexibility and was less restrictive.

## **Assessment**

As well as the change to teaching methods during the pandemic, major changes were made to assessment methods, with many more taking place online and in 'open book' type situations. During the pandemic and the year that followed, like with teaching, we had mixed feedback on whether students preferred assessments in-person or online.

One thing that was apparent during the pandemic, was the impact that online assessments had on the University's awarding gap between disabled and non-disabled students. The gap dropped significantly across all faculties during the pandemic, suggesting that moving to an online assessment model had a positive impact on these students. HUMS saw the most significant drop, from a 6.4% gap in 2018-19 to 0.6% in 2019-20. Therefore, we believe that a flexible approach where possible would meet the needs of our diverse range of students.

One issue raised by some students through our SSLC data is with 'assessment clumping', where multiple deadlines are close together and have a negative impact on students' workloads, and potentially, mental health. The department of Linguistics and English Language have recently introduced a policy on assessment clumping in response to this, which stops any deadlines within the department falling on the same day or multiple deadlines falling within the same fortnight. We would welcome something similar being rolled out across the institution, although we recognise that this becomes more complicated when considering Joint Honours degrees across departments.

## **Assessment Feedback**

Assessment feedback, referring to the feedback students receive from academic staff on their assessments, is an issue raised consistently by our students, as can be seen in the 2022 NSS data. It has been a key agenda item at Faculty Forums for the last two years. Satisfaction with the timeliness of feedback has declined by more than 17% in the NSS since 2019, and satisfaction with the helpfulness of feedback has dropped by nearly 10% over that time. The quantity and quality of assessment feedback came out worst overall in our BYMCR Survey, with only 32.65% of 5397 participants satisfied with the amount of feedback they were getting. SoE and SoNS, both schools in FSE, had the lowest scores of 24.93% and 27.17% respectively.

The timing of feedback is an issue felt by students across the institution. This is chiefly due to the University's complex policy on delivery of feedback to students. The policy specifies feedback to be returned within 15 working days but provides many convoluted examples of when this does not need to be adhered to and thus the timescale is often not met. We would welcome a standardisation of practice across the institution that meets the needs of our students, and an increase in resources where needed especially as student numbers increase.

Qualitative feedback from our SSLC's, Data Street Team research and the ARTL has told us that one of the key issues with timing for students is feedback not being issued in time to positively impact their next assignment. A number of Academic Reps told us that students would really benefit from formative assessment feedback coming in time to influence improvements on their summative assessment. Only 45.03% of students (N = 5399) in the BYMCR survey agreed that the quality of academic feedback was satisfactory, and our conversations with students tell us that they would prefer more personalised and specific feedback to inform improvements.

UoM have made assessment feedback one of their two top teaching and learning priorities for the year ahead, and so we are working with the University centrally, as well as with faculties, to feed in student voice on the common issues. Assessment feedback was a key agenda item on our two most recent Faculty Forums (late Nov 2022), both of which reflected the same problems identified in the section above. We hope that student opinion and suggestions from these will be used to inform good practice moving forward.

### **SE2 – How well course content and delivery engage students in their learning, and stretches students to develop their knowledge and skills**

Course content and curriculum were often named as excellent in both our quantitative and qualitative data. In our BYMCR survey, 73.11% of 5374 students believed that their curriculum was up to date and 72.71% of 5142 students agreed that it is appropriate for the global world. The quality of the curriculum comes up in feedback at SSLC's and across all faculties but was particularly strong in the Alliance Manchester Business School (AMBS) and the School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED), which are both within HUMS.

Exceptions can be found in our research with black students, where agreement that the curriculum is up to date was almost 10% lower than white students (at 66.26%, N = 163<sup>1</sup>), and 59.87% (n = 157) agreeing that the curriculum is appropriate for the global world compared to 77.21% of white students. Our focus groups with black students that informed our 'Voice Out: Feedback from Black Students' Report highlighted a lack of representation in course content of people of colour.

The University have funded a programme of Diversity and Inclusion Ambassadors (paid student staff) to pilot initiatives addressing barriers to learning faced by black students, which included developing a project around inclusive teaching resources. Work on decolonising the curriculum has also begun in parts of the University, with students in Politics and English Literature particularly recognising and appreciating these attempts. We would like to see a wider roll out of this work across the institution.

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

Recent national and global events – the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis – have seriously impacted the wellbeing of our students, so a supportive learning environment is essential to the academic experience. In our recent Cost of Living Survey, 36% of students (n = 4941) told us that the increased cost of living had negatively impacted their academic performance.

57.80% out of 5197 respondents in our BYMCR survey rated academic support at the University as excellent or good. Although this was one of the higher rated aspects in our survey, we know that the

---

<sup>1</sup> The participant numbers are lower in sections that use ethnicity data as not all students chose to disclose their ethnicity.

University rated below benchmark in the NSS and that there is inconsistency in student experiences across the institution. During the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, satisfaction with one-to-one support was considered very poor, with only 2.6 in 10 students (n = 3031) telling us through our Learning, Research and Support Survey, that they were satisfied with their experience of online one-to-one interaction.

For many students, their academic advisor is the main point of contact with the University, and the intersection between wellbeing and academic experience. Given this, the University cannot rely on pockets of good practice and needs to ensure that academic advising is consistently available and supportive across the institution. We are also concerned that the increasing student numbers will threaten the potential for academic support to be improved.

In the BYMCR Survey, although not specifically asked about disability support services, students with disabilities expressed a higher level of satisfaction than students without in the question about academic support. 62.96% of 729 students with disabilities and 57.03% of students without disabilities (N=3640) rated academic support as 'Excellent' or 'Good'. In SSLC minutes however, some students with disabilities mention that the academic support they receive from the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) is inaccessible and affects their academic experience. Students in the focus group with the University Board of Governors said that there was low knowledge of what the DASS had to offer or about groups such as the Disabled Student Society.

The University have recently provided additional funding to the Students' Union to increase the capacity in our Advice Service, and specifically for triaging and supporting students with lower-level case work such as mitigating circumstances and academic appeals. A review of the University's Mitigating Circumstances Policy is about to be undertaken, and we have welcomed the opportunity to gather and provide feedback from students to the University. In the student focus group with members of the University Board of Governors (February 2022), students fed back that they appreciated the classes offered by the library on topics such as referencing and conducting literature reviews.

## **SE6 – How well physical and virtual learning resources support teaching and learning**

We believe that the University needs to prioritise investing in physical and virtual learning resources for our students, especially in its IT infrastructure as this underpins many aspects of the academic experience. This need is only amplified by the increase in student numbers over the last few years.

### **IT**

Whilst just over half of student respondents in the BYMCR Survey (54.4%) rated IT as 'good' or 'excellent' (n = 5384), many students have consistently fed back a variety of IT issues as a key concern in recent years. Satisfaction is higher amongst international students at 58.01% (n = 1498). Representatives in 12 SSLC's raised IT as an issue last year, and in the ARTL we heard from Reps that the Blackboard system feels quite outdated, there are regular issues with Wi-Fi on campus and that students do not feel like they can rely on University systems for meeting assessment deadlines on time.

Students also mentioned that communications around IT issues were poor, however we do acknowledge that following feedback at the ARTL, the IT department put out communications to students acknowledging the issues faced and providing details of planned improvements moving forward. We look forward to working closely with IT moving forward to ensure that student opinion can be fed in regularly to drive improvements.

## **Module Enrolment**

Module enrolment is essential for many of our students as it is how they access the academic pathways advertised and offered to them. We welcome a substantial offer of module choices being available to our students, however, we believe that significant work is needed to change how it is administered.

Although 51.83% of 4625 students rated module enrolment as 'good' or excellent', our qualitative data tells us that many students do have an issue with it, especially in HUMS. 28.16% of HUMS students rated module enrolment as 'poor' or 'very poor' (n = 1939). We also know that for those students who have expressed dissatisfaction with module enrolment, it is an issue that impacts them every year and causes significant stress. There are many complaints about it in SSLC minutes and it came up as an issue in the ARTL, especially for HUMS students.

Students fed back to our Data Street Team that the Student System interface is outdated and difficult to use, with many describing the process as unclear, messy and faulty. As an example, one Rep from the AMBS in HUMS reported in the ARTL that the information booklet their course was provided with to do Module Selection was 34 pages long and from 2012.

## **Physical Environment**

In the student focus group with the University Board of Governors members in February 2022, students fed back concerns about the condition of the library and the need for more study spaces available post 6pm. Students also fed back that they were impressed with the new Engineering building and appreciated the ability to use spaces in there even if they were not from FSE.

HESA data tells us that student numbers have gone up from 40,180 students studying Undergraduate or Postgraduate courses full-time or part-time in 2017-18, to 44,450 in 2021-22. We believe that this number has risen again in this academic year to 45,740 students studying at UoM. Although we recognise that this increase is not entirely in the University's control, one of the concerns that has come up regularly this academic year is the impact of the increased number of students at UoM on the learning environment and experience.

In the ARTL, students fed back that the increase in numbers means that teaching and study spaces can often be crowded, student staff ratios are affected and that it is impacting their learning experience. We will continue to monitor student feedback on this in the year ahead and would encourage the University to undertake an immediate review of the impact of increased student numbers on the student experience, which we hope will lead to positive action moving forward.

## **SE7 – How well the University engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students**

We recognise that the University engages with its students on a regular basis and that there are a variety of ways for students to feedback on their experience throughout the year. The University undertakes a variety of surveys and focus groups, and students receive University communications on a regular basis. The University also works with 'Students as Partners', where it pays student staff to engage in projects across the University. Although we believe that the opportunity to engage with students is there, we do think that more work is needed on communicating the impact of student feedback and any changes it has led to.

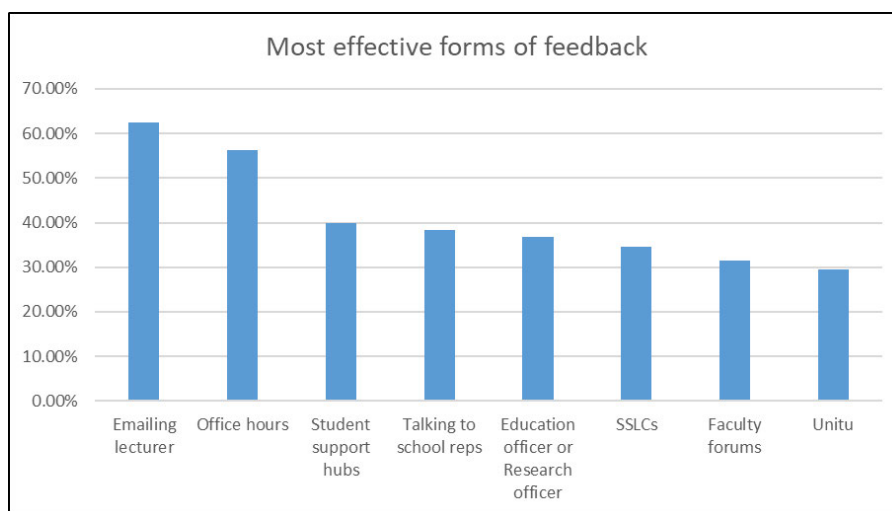
As a Students' Union, we have a productive working relationship with the University at a central level and provide student representation on all key committees. Our officers have regular access to the senior leadership team at the University and are able to feedback the views of students through a variety of channels. We have recently restructured our officer and staff team so that we are able to work more effectively at a faculty and school level, to ensure that we are able to influence decisions affecting students throughout the University and to push for change at all levels.

## Student Voice

A major mechanism for students to feedback their opinion to the University is through Academic Reps, of which there are now around 1300 annually. The University also produces surveys and course evaluation questionnaires for students and are piloting an online platform for direct feedback called Unitu.

Although we believe students are regularly asked for their opinion through a variety of means, students have told us that they do not believe they can influence change, and that their voice makes little difference to institutional decision-making. The NSS shows that there is low satisfaction with student voice, and our BYMCR Survey results tell us that students feel like they can influence decisions more at a course level (36.65% agreement, n = 5233) rather than at a University level (17.32%, n = 5236), although the numbers for both are very low.

We asked students what they thought were the most effective forms of feedback in implementing change. 62.51% of 5087 respondents believed that emailing their lecturer was the most effective:



There are a number of examples of where the University have effectively engaged with students to bring about positive change for our students, however we believe that better communication of these wins for students and 'closing the loop' is essential so that students know where they have been able to influence change.

During the past couple of months, the University have worked very closely with our elected officers to respond to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our students. The partnership has been greatly effective and has resulted in some small and large initiatives for our students, all instigated by feedback from our officers. This has shown how quickly the University can respond to the major issues affecting our students when it needs to.

We are pleased that the University has chosen student voice as one of its two teaching and learning priorities for the year ahead. We are currently working with the University on their Student Survey



Strategy and are developing a number of joint initiatives such as student voice training for academic staff.

## **Student Outcomes**

In this section we will focus on indicators SO1, SO4 and SO5 to look at how the University supports student outcomes and educational gain. We recognise that the benchmarking data for student outcomes are positive, and that having studied at UoM will likely have a positive impact on the outcomes of our graduates.

### **Positive Outcomes**

#### **SO1 - How well the University supports its students to succeed and progress beyond their studies**

We conducted an Alumni Survey in partnership with the University to gain insight on what graduates think about the learning outcomes from their studies. Responses were broadly positive, especially with regards to progression after University. Out of the 250 alumni surveyed, 74.7% agreed that studying their specific degree helped them to get a job or reach their aspirations. 86.8% agreed that the skills they gained during their course helped them to get a job or reach their other goals. The skills that came out top for our graduates were time management (64%); analytical skills (62%); research/critical thinking (61.2%) and communication skills (60.4%).

Survey respondents who identified themselves as having a disability however, expressed lower satisfaction with their progression since leaving University. 70% of respondents with a disability (N = 30) said that studying at UoM helped them to get a job or reach their aspirations, compared to 79.12% of respondents without a disability. This suggests that more support with personal development and progression, such as careers, may be needed for our students with disabilities.

### **Educational Gains**

#### **SO4 – What educational gains the University intends its students to achieve, and how relevant these are to its students**

Another aspect of learning outcomes that was investigated in the Alumni Survey was educational gains. The University articulates educational gains under three main themes, relating principally to academic development, personal development and work readiness. These are 'being curious' (emphasising and being able to talk about academic achievements); 'being courageous' (enabling socially responsible graduates to change the world); and 'being connected' (supporting career readiness). When we asked students in our BYMCR Survey what concerns they had, 'getting a job at the end of my degree' came out near the top, with 52.52% of UG participants selecting this as a concern.

We have reflected on Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) in this section as part of academic development. As part of our research, we hosted a School Forum with Academic Reps from across the University's nine schools. Out of the 25 Academic Reps, 24 mentioned that ILOs were described in lectures or online (e.g., Blackboard), suggesting that students are given a clear outline of what these ILOs are intended to be. Feedback was similar from students across the schools.

## **SO5 – How well the University supports its students to achieve these gains**

Representatives at our School Forum were asked whether they received support in reaching their learning goals. 80% of Academic Reps said that they felt adequate support was provided in all or most of their modules. Where this wasn't the case, negative feedback came from across the schools rather than in one particular area.

74.06% of respondents in our Alumni Survey said that they believed the ILOs were clearly described in most or all of their courses. 70.9% of students who responded believed that they were supported in reaching their ILOs in all or most modules, with respondents telling us that lectures and practical questions were the most helpful in reaching them.

Via our block grant, the University funds the Students' Union to deliver a number of enrichment activities for our students, including societies and volunteering programmes, which positively enhance the personal development of those involved. These programmes are student led, and we provide training and support to develop the skills of the student leaders of these groups. Students are able to record their extra-curricular volunteering through the University's Stellify Award, and for graduating students in 2021, those who achieved the Stellify Award included 148 Academic Reps, 186 society committee members and 32 project leaders.

## **Conclusion**

In this submission, we have provided a strong, evidence-based assessment of student opinion on Teaching Excellence at UoM as per the TEF indicators. It is clear from our survey and benchmarking data that students who graduate from UoM are likely to succeed and progress, and that studying here enables the majority of our students to reach their aspirations.

We believe that the priority focus now needs to be on the experience of current students, and ensuring a consistent, excellent experience across the University. We agree with the University's decision to prioritise assessment feedback and student voice as key areas for development this year, however we also think there needs to be significant consideration given to the impact of the increase in student numbers on the student experience, and the need to consider increasing resource accordingly.

As a Students' Union, we have already significantly increased our partnership work with the University over the past few months and have been able to feed in the student point of view at a school, faculty and institution level. We will continue to push the University to not only seek the opinions of our students, but to also respond to their feedback in a timely and effective manner. We look forward to working with the University over the next four years to address the issues identified in this submission, and to ensure excellent experience and outcomes for our students.