

## **Student submission for TEF 2023**

### **Approach to evidence-gathering.**

In my role in compiling this submission I was approached by UCW and asked if I would be interested in completing the student submission. At the broader university, I am a student that also sits as a Student Representative, Student Ambassador, member of the Sustainability Society and sits on the Weston College Group Sustainability Committee.

In creating this submission, there has been involvement from four other students, these were student representatives

To gather the evidence for this submission a survey was created to feedback on the student experience of all students at UCW. We initially surveyed Student Representatives, then the wider student body and a focus group with Student Representatives to discuss the results. This was used to gather evidence towards the current student experience.

The survey was open to students from all courses at UCW to voice their opinion. Whilst their courses may not have been included in the provider submission, they are still students at UCW, and their views and opinions should be included. The survey results were summarised and made available to Student Representatives for comment.

A focus group was held to discuss the survey results and add more detail from Student Representatives' discussions with their classes. The group was open to all Student Representatives, five of whom attended. Also present at the meeting were two members of the UCW Higher Education faculty, the HE Academic Registrar and the HE Student Experience Manager, who served as minute takers and were able to provide further evidence as requested it.

A further and final meeting was held with the Student Representatives to discuss the draft and agree on the final submission.

UCW provided further evidence on request. This included the results for the last three years of the National Student Survey (NSS), the continuation rate of students and the graduate outcome survey. These were used in helping to complete the student outcome section.

The NSS covers the last three years of graduating students and includes 18 courses from the 2019/2020 cohort, 17 from the 2020/2021 cohort and 25 from the 2021/2022 cohort that met the threshold for their results to be recorded and used in compiling the report.

The help and support from UCW in writing this submission have been very hands-off and very supportive at the same time. Hands off in that they have not influenced decisions, suggested questions for the survey, or influence the discussion in the focus group. When participating in the focus group minimum interactions were observed, when minute taking, this was carried out on a shared live document that was being monitored by the students.

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Supportive in that, being able speak to the senior faculty involved with the provider submission at will to address any issues that arose. Regular check-ins by the alternate student contact, to see how it is going and if there is any extra support required. Arrange and facilitate any meetings or focus groups as required and speak to faculty members on our behalf. Welfare check-ins to ensure course workload and the student submission were not becoming overbearing.

Sharing of information that was requested in a very timely manner.

Abstracts from the provider submission from the Assistant Principal – of Higher Education, had been regularly provided, with the option to comment on information in the abstract. Furthermore, opportunity to attend the meeting to approve the provider submission and comment further on its content.

### **Student experience.**

The focus group discussed some of the main attractions that brought students to UCW; five main reasons that attracted the students to UCW were identified.

First were the smaller class sizes, with having fewer students per class; the overall feel of the course was it was more personal, with the lectures being more approachable. It is generally felt that having a more focused and personal interaction with the lecturers, results in more enthusiastic and engaged students that are performing higher.

Secondly, the lower numbers in a class meant that courses could be more hands-on, with all those expressing that hands-on experience was vital in preparing them for the industries they would like to enter after graduation, this is because they have had more of an opportunity to contribute and debate with lectures who have an in-depth knowledge of industry as well as with fellow students. It was also mentioned that where some had friends doing a similar course at other universities, they were getting a different level of hands-on experience.

Thirdly, with UCW being a part of the Weston College Group allows local students from disadvantaged backgrounds, students with learning disabilities and mental health conditions, to continue their studies from Further to Higher Education with continued support. This allows for lower costs as they did not need to move away from home, making HE more affordable also, those with learning disabilities or mental health issues can stay close to their support networks. Progression to UCW is supported through outreach events, such as open days, community events and school/college talks. This helps those aspiring to higher education understand their options not just with UCW but within higher education in general.

Fourthly, whilst all universities have the option to undertake screening for undiagnosed learning disabilities, UCW has a policy that primary screening is carried out by all students during enrolment. Most students we spoke to about this appreciate this screening, with many students having been diagnosed with learning disabilities and now receiving the support they require through UCW's excellent team of dedicated Specialist Support Practitioners.

Finally, a good variety of lecturers on each course, with different backgrounds. With many of the lecturers having come from industry-based roles, it was felt that between the lecturer's knowledge

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and the course content, that courses are relevant to the working environment. An example of this that was shared with the focus group was from a BA Musical Theatre student who described how many of the students on their course had applied solely because of a lecturer that taught a particular breathing technique and was one of only three in the country that did. Some of the courses, such as BSc Applied Computing, have Specialist Lecturers who can bring even more knowledge into the classroom, such as having a Software Engineering Specialist Lecturer who is able to provide students with a more detailed insight into what programming will be like in industry, furthering the prospects of students.

### **Academic experience and assessment.**

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

The survey asked specific questions about the feedback students received and the support they felt they got from their lecturers. Everyone who participated in the survey answered both these questions; of the 19 courses that submitted responses to the survey, 79.7% of the courses said that they received feedback within the time scale as set out in the course handbook, with the remaining 20.3% not receiving the feedback within the time frame.

The focus group further discussed this, where two representatives were on courses with delayed feedback. In one course, the reasons for the delay had been explained to the students; in the other, no reason was given, and it took a request for feedback before it was received. However, the students in the focus group expressed that they understood that if feedback was late, there were underlying issues that caused the delay.

Students surveyed were very supportive of the feedback they received, with 90.6% of courses saying that they felt the feedback was fair and constructive, with only 9.4% feeling it was not fair or constructive. Of the 84 individual respondents, this changed significantly to 97.1% of individuals saying they felt their feedback was fair and constructive and 2.9% disagreeing with the statement. This was equal to two students that stated they felt the feedback they had received could have been more helpful and specific.

Furthermore, within the focus group it was discussed that some students could feel emotionally aggrieved by the feedback if the grade and comments were not as expected. However, it was also agreed that this was generally rectified once emotions had calmed down. The focus group went on to agree that the feedback was an accurate and fair analysis of the learning outcomes achieved by students, and that the constructive criticism from the lecturers was in-depth and allows the learner to understand what skills they need to develop for future assessments.

Further to the feedback, it was discussed at the focus group that cohorts benefitted from the resilience workshops that the HEART team (student support) ran with all first-year students. However, some felt that additional resilience training should be provided to second year and third-year students due to the success of the sessions.

The students in the focus group also understood that feedback is essential in preparing for employment. Students also described how they were encouraged by their tutors to be reflective on

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their feedback. Feedback was also an opportunity for students to reflect on what they had done well; it is not just areas of improvement and has an equal focus on what has gone well.

Further to the feedback, tutorials were discussed in the focus group and on the survey. In the survey, 92.2% of courses said they received regular tutorials, with only 7.8% saying they did not. The Student Representative from BA Art and Design commented that they felt that there is a circle of feedback – students can input into the learning process and have an impact on teaching.

When this was discussed in the focus group, it was noticed that 7.8% students that did not have regular tutorials was from three courses. Those courses that did not receive regular tutorials were the BSc Environmental Health Practitioner year one (delivered online remotely), three BSc Applied Computing year one, and BA Uniformed and Public Services year one course. Whilst as a group, we would not speculate on the reasons why, it was recognised in the responses to the survey, though, that those from the BSc Environmental Health Practitioner course were an online course and degree apprenticeship which could have a factor. In addition, whilst some students had received tutorials, other respondents expressed that they could not have tutorials due to personal circumstances. Whilst others still needed to be offered one at the time of the survey, or in the case of one respondent, they had had a tutorial with two of their lecturers but not with a third.

The Student Representative for BSc Applied Computing, year three, was present at the focus group; whilst he was surprised, it was said they were not getting regular tutorials within the year one cohort. From his personal experience through his time at UCW that there had been structured weekly discussions with the lecturing staff to discuss any issues or queries, although these did not count as formal recorded tutorials, he found them beneficial. In addition, tutors were always available for help and advice. All Student Representatives at the focus group agreed that the ability to have these open, honest, and frank discussions and subsequent after-class informal chats with lectures could be described as tutorials.

When describing the open, honest, and frank discussions on the survey for both class and individuals, 100% of respondents said they felt listened to and that their opinions mattered. In the focus group, it was said that they appreciated this personalised approach to formal and informal tutorials and discussions and that also their concerns were listened to and actioned on. It was also agreed in the focus group that lectures try to make themselves available outside of timetabled lectures.

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

The students recognise the lecturer's background and academic/industry experience. In addition, students appreciate the drive and passion for the subject that lecturers display. When asked on the survey if students felt their course content was relevant, 96.3% of respondents agreed, they felt the course content was relevant, however, this increased when asked if they felt supported from their lectures to increase knowledge and understanding, with 98.7% agreeing.

## **SE3. How far research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement contribute to the student academic experience.**

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31.7% of respondents to the survey are enrolled on a degree apprenticeship course. When asked, overall, it was felt that they were well supported by their employer but needed help with the employer work/university work balance. A group submission on the survey by the students from the BEng Aerospace Engineering course commented that the first-year students needed help with time management of course work. A student from the BSc Environmental Health Practitioner course commented that they were not getting support from their employer, which they found challenging.

However, other BSc Environmental Health Practitioner students recognised that as it was an online course, there could be issues around attending online lectures and work commitments.

We addressed these comments to the faculty present at the focus group, who advised us that they were aware of these issues and were talking with employers and students to try and find a solution.

### **Resources, support, and student engagement.**

#### **SE4. How well the university or college supports staff professional development and academic practice.**

In terms of progression, learning, teaching and assessment can impact upon students' employability and help to prepare students for industry, lecturers have experience in industry and can relate the learning and teaching back to industry and ensure that what they teach is relevant and will support progression.

73.4% of students thought academic practice supported this. One comment made on the survey when asked about teaching said, "It's better than I expected - it's much more supportive than a traditional university and the teachers actually teach you the skills and knowledge you need rather than just expecting you to learn it yourself." With another saying, "There are a lot of different units to study and the support and help and guidance from tutors is amazing."

26.6% of students did not agree, with some comments including: "There is a lack of organisation into the college and there are conflicting ideas from different teachers that affects the delivery of certain lecturers and our learning."

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

All Student Representatives agreed that, in general, the facilities are good at UCW. The BSc Applied Computing Student Representative commented that the facilities are excellent for their course. Students value the IT labs, and they like that they can work late in the labs in the Winter Gardens.

While some facilities cannot support lone working (the biological laboratory and some art studios) due to the equipment in them, students did agree that when they do access the facilities, they are fit for purpose and industry relevant. In addition, students can contact technicians if they need support or training on using any equipment. While there have been issues with some accessibility to technicians in art studios, the students do appreciate that there have been recent staff changes.

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One area of frustration is accessing niche specialist equipment outside of a cohort's regular equipment, i.e., photography undertaking a microphotography project and wanting access to the science labs. In addition, contact to arrange access is only possible from faculty to faculty through lecturers, which can cause frustration with students who need to be made aware of what is happening and, as such, can find it challenging to plan.

The survey asked if students have accessed central support services, with 47.6% of the respondents having accessed these services. Of that, 94.9% said that the support was worthwhile, leaving comments such as "Academic support was very easy and well organised." and "Spoken to representatives of the HEART team during induction, and they do offer good range of services to help students. Most students who have used services such as the HEART team have said they were almost always able to solve their issue."

Of the 5.1% who did not feel support was worthwhile; some felt the process of accessing support was "Fairly easy, some parts seem a little complicated", however, one student who answered it was not worthwhile commented "I am still in the process of accessing that support at this time, I do not know if it will have been worthwhile yet".

In comments about academic support, there was high praise for the academic support teams, including Careers Coach, with comments including "The careers advisor was incredibly helpful, helping with my CV and job application.", and "Yes because I used [Academic Development Team] to help with some of my modules last year." The Student Representative for BSc Applied Computing had accessed the careers service at UCW and stated they received incredible support and guidance from the career's advisor.

Welfare support for mental health issues and learning difficulties also received praise with no negative comments. One student commented concerning welfare support, "Due to a bad experience it was a struggle to come to university but after talking to the wellbeing team, it helps me to understand that how I was feeling was normal." Another commented, "They diagnosed my dyslexia and have provided me support and showed me where I can access other or more help."

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

The survey asked if students have either been affected by covid and had to access online teaching or if they have had virtual classes. 32.8% of respondents to the survey said that they have had to or currently do use online teaching resources. Of that, 23.8% of respondents reported feeling disadvantaged by online learning. However, 20% reported having a medical condition that made using online teaching challenging. 33.3% of students feel it improved their teaching experience.

The remaining 42.9% of students responded with comments such as "Online learning was quite challenging, but as we settled into the group, this improved and UCW was very good and supportive with this, we had a small group which helped." Furthermore, "We did blended learning which I thought I would hate as my preference was classroom, but I actually enjoyed a mixture of both, especially with the course being part time and having a full-time job, doing a bit of both was the best of both worlds."

71.4% of respondents felt that UCW did a good job in online teaching, with comments like "This was the first blended course I have experienced, and it was much better than I anticipated."

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28.6% thought there could have been more done with online teaching and some administrative tasks. One respondent, from BSc Environmental Health Practitioner commented, "There were serious and very frustrating problems for some students who joined in September but didn't even get a student number and login until 2 months later. This is unnecessary. Every college knows its student intake time. The whole year builds up from final exams/assessments through to new admissions come September. It's not a surprise to any department so there really is no excuse for not having things ready to roll come the start of a new school year. This could all have been done much better and was rather disappointing (I was late to join, so I am not speaking for myself but for the other students who were hugely frustrated and stressed about it)."

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

As part of standard practice that the UCW adopts is that it carries out Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC), these are carried out once a semester and are held with all courses and cohorts. From personnel experience, it has always been an excellent opportunity to openly express issues and concerns about all aspects of your course, and issues within the wider university experience with a senior member of the faculty.

With not having your lecturers present while discussing teaching, it gives a platform to express issues on teaching methods course content even facilities within UCW. It makes students feel that their opinions matter and are valued, the meetings have led to a change in teaching practices and an improvement in facilities.

With being a relatively young university centre, there is a lack of extra-curricular societies that you would find at traditional universities, however, this changes every year with more being started each year. HEART run regular activities for students to join in with and are always open to new suggestions for events.

### **Student Outcomes.**

#### **SO1. How well the university or college supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.**

Student Representatives commented that their confidence has improved in their degree course. However, there was a discussion about the importance of academic progression, and the skills needed to secure a job were as essential – skills like communication and interpersonal skills that were gained through their degree.

#### **SO2. How good students' rates of continuation and completion are.**

UCW has shared with us the Continuation rate for 2021-22; which was at 94.5%, which is well above the national average. There was discussion on why this would be, again, the personalised approach to learning and teaching, along with the flexibility of the curriculum. Students with personal difficulties can access HEART support and move to part-time if needed.

The Student Representatives were confident they knew where to access support if they needed it, mainly from HEART or the library (Academic Development Team). Only one respondent to the

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survey commented that they did not know where to go for support; this was

### **SO3. How good students' rates of progression to skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes are.**

UCW shared that 63% of graduates are in paid work (this data comes from the Graduate Outcomes survey), and 9% are in self-employment.

Self-employment preparation and entrepreneurial skills are embedded within many of UCW courses. Within the Creative Arts curriculum (e.g., Art and Film), modules support students in these programmes to have the confidence to set up their own successful businesses or become freelance professionals.

The BA Art and Design Student Representative shared one of their work-based learning experiences, which supports this. They recently ran a Pop-Up show designed to simulate real-life working practices, and students use this as a learning process for those wanting to set up their own business after graduating. The students value this as they are involved in the marketing and promotion of this event along with the logistics of putting on a show/exhibition. Collaboration between two disciplines (Art and Graphics) was required, and students were developing their academic and employability skills in this project. As part of the reflection and evaluation process, the students met with UCW's Marketing department to discuss improving ahead of any similar projects/briefs.

### **Educational gains.**

#### **SO6. How far the university or college evaluates and demonstrates the gains made by its students.**

Student Representatives were asked to have input into what Educational Gain meant for them, and they agreed that Educational Gain is more than the development of academic skills.

UCW supports these in several ways; through feedback (assessment and pastoral), course content and the structure of the courses. For example, presentations in a course inevitably support the development of interpersonal and communication skills.

We were provided with the NSS final year student surveys for the last three, and they will be used to evidence how academic educational gains have changed over the last three years. However, each year UCW publishes the results, even though they are publicly available on the office for student's website.

UCW was higher than the national average in all areas that the survey measured.

The amount higher than the national average last year in each of the measures being: teaching 4%, learning opportunities 4%, assessment and feedback 15%, academic support 9%, organisation and management 10%, learning resources 2%, learning community 14%, student voice 13% with an overall satisfaction rate being 6% higher than the national average.

It is recognised, though, that whilst UCW is not in the top quartile of institutions, having a smaller cohort means that one student's opinion can significantly impact the results more significantly than in larger institutions.