

TEF Student Submission: Nottingham Trent University (NTU)

Section 1: Approach to Evidence Gathering

NTSU is Nottingham Trent University's (NTU's) affiliated Student Union, run by elected members of the student body. The President and their elected team are current students and recent graduates who work full-time to represent the students at NTU. The President has been supported in the creation of the submission by the Vice-President Education, as well as the Student Voice Team (permanent staff members at NTSU).

Evidence and data utilised in the submission has been gathered over the last three months, to provide the most up to date and accurate representation of the views and experiences of NTU students. This evidence has been gathered from a survey completed by **471** current NTU students as well as **12** focus groups run across all NTU campuses. The survey and focus groups were promoted to our members through NTSU's communication channels, as well as via our Course Representatives and School Officers.

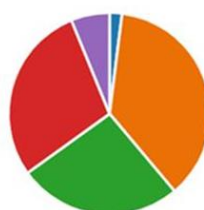
When developing the survey questions, we considered the TEF indicators, alongside NTU's current strategy, 'University, reimagined'. The strategy is built around six core principles which aim to create the 'university of the future'. We identified areas of this strategy which related to TEF indicators to create core focuses for our survey. The survey was incentivised by the opportunity to win one of three £100 supermarket vouchers, which was considered an appropriate choice for the current cost of living crisis. The survey remained open for just over one month, however once the initial responses started coming in, we analysed them for the key issues which students were raising. We used these student priorities to shape the questions included in our focus groups, so we could add qualitative insight to the data we were collecting.

Both the survey and the focus groups have produced a wealth of information that NTSU intend to utilise beyond this submission, which will be useful in our ongoing collaboration with NTU to work towards the best possible experience for our members.

The survey was open to all NTU undergraduates, as well as postgraduate students who completed their undergraduate degree at NTU in the last 4 years. (The latter included just **16** of our respondents, who were asked to focus exclusively on their time as undergraduates at NTU.) The survey was open to apprenticeship students and foundation students, however, did not include those on courses delivered outside of the UK or validated courses. Below are some graphs detailing the demographics of survey respondents for reference:

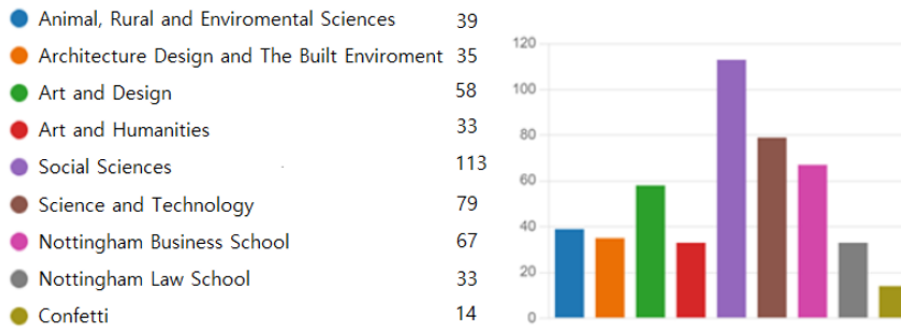
Current year of study:

● Foundation	9
● First Year	168
● Second Year	119
● Third Year	131
● Fourth Year	28



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NTU School:



NTU Campus:



groups were carried out over three weeks, from late November to mid-December 2022. The focus groups were open to the same students as the survey. Due to the lack of anonymity, detailed demographic data was not collected,

The campus split was as follows:

We have had regular contact with throughout the process. They have been forthcoming in offering support and guidance, and while we have opted to use

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data gathered independently, they have regularly checked that we have access to the data which we require. We have maintained independence from NTU throughout the process, and while we have shared a draft of the submission, this has not impacted the content in any way, and was provided as a courtesy to NTU. Our approach has been entirely determined by NTSU, and our content reflects the genuine experiences and opinions of NTU students. We did not sit on NTU's TEF Stakeholder Board. The incentives and staff time have been funded entirely by NTSU. We can confirm that Nottingham Trent University did not unduly influence the content of this submission.

Section 2: Student Experience

Our members have strong and numerous opinions on their experiences of practical learning at NTU, a topic that comes up consistently in varying feedback forums. Our survey asked the following: **'How satisfied are you that teaching and assessments are delivered in innovative and varied ways?'** Of 471 responses, **80%** of students were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied'.

Students had the option to elaborate on their answer if they wished. were centred around teaching sessions being engaging and interactive; this was achieved through the incorporation of guest lectures from professionals in various fields, a blend of workshops, seminars and tutorials that assisted the delivery of course content, and the personal and tailored approach of academic staff to individuals. The student response to the above can be broken down further by campus with the following percentages of students stating they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied':

Brackenhurst: **89%** City: **80%** Clifton: **84%** Confetti: **75%** Mansfield: **66%**

We recognise that for the smaller campuses (specifically Mansfield and Confetti), this insight is less statistically reliable due to the smaller number of students completing the survey, however it is worth noting that the number of students studying at these campuses is also comparatively much lower. It is evident here, that although the positive satisfaction levels remain a majority across the board for innovative teaching, we can see some disparity across student experience between campuses.

The focus groups held enabled deeper conversations with students from specific campuses. Brackenhurst students (statistically the most satisfied in this area) were very positive about the learning resources and support received. They recognised when lecturers were accommodating to their learning styles and appreciated when this was reflected in teaching. Brackenhurst students valued interactivity and quizzes, as it enabled them to consolidate their learning. Consolidation was a consistent theme, and the staff that took the time to review what had been learned at the end of sessions were viewed favourably. To consolidate their learning further, students would like to see an increase in the practical applications of theory in the real world and apply it to industry. There

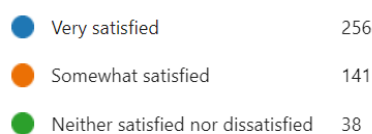
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was a sense of concern about what happens beyond university and students wanted a 'more vocational approach' across their modules to prepare them.

This focus on future vocations was not specific to Brackenhurst students, and similar conversations were repeated across focus groups. Both City and Clifton focus groups wanted more guest speakers and external organisations to visit their courses to improve their networking opportunities and offer advice on industry expertise. Although in the survey, positives were raised about the use of guest speakers and industry visitors for some students, feedback in focus groups suggested an imbalance across courses. There was a particular feeling from City students that any career fair events were tailored to Business students and did not offer networking opportunities beyond this.

City and Clifton students also wanted more consolidation of learning through interactive testing and implementing more discussion time within lectures. Clifton and City focus groups also raised that more group work and a lowered emphasis on lectures could result in increased engagement. SCALE-UP sessions are valued as they provide students this opportunity to work together and learn from each other. The ability for students to communicate with each other in this way is valued across all campuses at NTU.

When discussing the different approaches to learning and teaching techniques, students offered their thoughts on the practical aspects of the accessibility of taught content, including issues and preferences surrounding online versus face-to-face teaching, and timetabling challenges. Our survey asked the following related question: **'How satisfied are you with the balance of in-person and face-to-face teaching you have received at NTU?'** We found **84%** of all survey responses were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with over **50%** being 'very satisfied'.



Considering the challenges with Covid over recent years, this is a broadly positive response. **42** students followed up this question to specifically mention a good balance between the online and in-person offering. Despite this, it remains a challenging area, and it is clear there is no one perfect solution that suits all students or even all courses. respondents to the survey directly requested more in person sessions, and a further requested that the blend of the two is flexible to account for extenuating circumstances. Students who have transitioned from online to face-to-face post Covid, have stated that they lacked support adapting to a different way of learning. Skills that would have once been a basic expectation by a certain point during a degree proved a challenge, such as 'note taking skills for live lectures [that] have not been developed over time'. The student responses can again be broken down further by campus with the following percentages of students stating they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied':

Brackenhurst: **92%** City: **84%** Clifton: **83%** Confetti: **58%** Mansfield: **83%**

This disparity of experience was also highlighted in the focus groups. Brackenhurst students (reporting the highest levels of satisfaction) talked about how valuable in-person sessions were for interacting both with other students and with staff. They had all returned completely to in person-learning and agreed it was an essential part of the university experience. Experiences of online

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learning during Covid had been isolating, an opinion particularly highlighted by a mature student. Others commented that their peers had turned their cameras off and disengaged, therefore the return to in-person had improved the ability for students to connect and learn from each other. Students noted a significant difference between students who took a placement year, and those who did not, as those that did not started during Covid, and therefore entirely online, resulting in a reduction in their ability to interact and work with peers.

City students raised similar issues of isolation online, and difficulty engaging with their peers and tutors, however unlike Brackenhurst, they still have online sessions, and for some courses, the teaching is still mostly online. Clifton students similarly were facing a mix of online and in-person, depending on the course, and again stressed the additional value of in-person sessions. Confetti students are primarily on practical courses, and therefore felt a particular benefit from in-person learning, however they were still receiving a split of the two. Students from City and Clifton both shared significant frustration that the modules they perceived to be most difficult, were the modules that were delivered online only, so they did not feel they had access to the additional support which they required. While the 'most difficult module' will of course be subjective, this highlights a theme that not all students are entirely opposed to some online learning, rather they want to see more consideration and logic to how the teaching is split, where this is the case. Clifton students raised that their evening sessions could be placed online, as those with parenting responsibilities may need to be home by this point. Students from City and Clifton both provided examples of online sessions being timetabled directly before in-person sessions. This meant that not only did they have to be onsite before their online session began, but they had no timetabled space to 'attend', making it less accessible than if it were in-person. This issue was repeated across sessions, suggesting a significant barrier to online learning is the timetabling behind it. Students regularly acknowledged the accessibility benefits that online working provides for some students, but as highlighted by a Confetti student, this is not the case for everyone, and there should not be an assumption that every student has a practical working space at home.

Students that had mostly in-class sessions, even those that preferred it, mentioned that there are times they are unable to attend, such as sickness, and as a result they highly valued lecture capture. This was raised across all campuses as a positive when it works, however there are frustrations that not all staff are utilising it, and there are still spaces across NTU where lecture capture does not work. Students felt strongly that this should be standardised, and that as a modern university, this technology should work in all teaching spaces across all campuses. This leads to a further question asked in our survey: **'How satisfied are you that the technology and facilities at NTU are up to date and relevant to your course?'**

This resulted in some of the most positive feedback for any of our questions with **93%** answering that they are 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied'. Although positive, students did have some feedback for improvement. The most raised issue was consistency in lecture capture facilities. Other comments were very course and individual specific, such as 3D software required by Confetti students being unavailable in Boots library, or Adobe Creative Cloud Licenses being site

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specific, so students are unable to practice outside of class time. There was also a small amount of discussion across focus groups about the Nottingham Online Workspace (NOW), the platform which NTU use to publish their course content. Students face navigation difficulties with NOW at times and would appreciate a standardised approach by module leaders, so they consistently know how and where to find things.

A top line aim of NTU's 'University, reimagined' strategy is that students 'feel supported, inspired, and appreciated'. For this to be the case, it is essential that students feel listened to, so a key area which we opted to focus on was the honesty and transparency of NTU teaching staff, as well as their organisational approach to feedback on student opinion. Our survey asked: **'How satisfied are you that NTU's response to Student feedback is Honest and Transparent?'** 78% were 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied',

There is however a slight scepticism around student feedback and how it is used, with a suggestion that NTU can be particular with the feedback they choose to highlight 'for marketing purposes, which is often favourable, biased or heavily selected'. This uncertainty about NTU's intention with student feedback was one which was also discussed during focus groups. All groups were asked "In what way do you believe NTU values the student voice?" As expected, this gave us a deeper understanding of the student position on feedback. Across all campuses it was acknowledged that NTU frequently asks for student opinion, and students valued the variety of ways they could feedback. It was even noted on more than one occasion that they understood NTU to be more invested in the student voice than other institutions attended by their peers. However, as with survey respondents, there was a lack of certainty around intention and a suggestion that sometimes these exercises felt like 'box-ticking'. The students specifically appreciated the opportunity to give individual and in-depth feedback, noting the focus groups themselves as a useful approach. Those who were directly listened to felt more trust that their feedback would be acted upon, however large surveys were not considered as valuable, and as one Confetti student articulated, they fear they have the potential to be "a bit pointless as they are often lost as a number within the data". It is a consistent theme across all areas that students wish for a tailored and individualised approach.

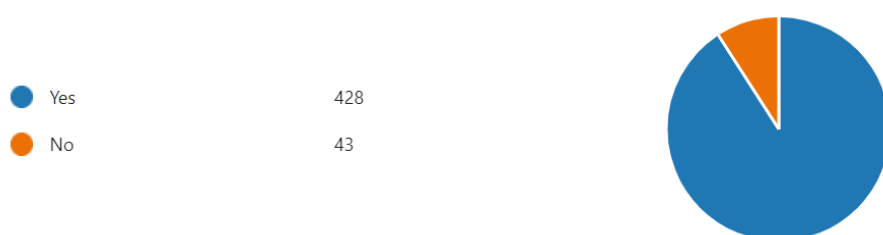
This individual approach is better achieved in terms of feedback on smaller courses, with students from cohorts with lower numbers reporting better dialogue and honest feedback with staff, as opposed to those in larger groups, who feel they must work harder to reach out, to have their voices heard. This is evident in terms of campus responses, with more positive examples of NTU acting on feedback from Confetti, Mansfield and Brackenhurst students, as opposed to the larger sites at City and Clifton. It was also noted by some, that there is an anxiety about feeding back directly to academic staff, in case it is not well-received, however this was very much on a case-by-

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case basis, and specific to the individual personalities of both the staff and the students. Those who felt this anxiety appreciated the opportunity to feedback to NTSU as an external body.

Another concern raised on numerous occasions was either lack of action following student feedback, or the lack of reporting on what action had been taken. This would suggest a key area to address by NTU is closing the feedback loop. Students are keen to feedback and are genuinely grateful for the opportunities provided to do so, however they want more information about what happens beyond this point. A student summarised that 'seeing a change following their feedback makes it really worthwhile.' Consistency in staff actively both seeking feedback and sharing results is key, as is a genuine interest in individual student experience.

This focus on the individual is key across all areas of the student experience, and we recognise that to thrive in their academic studies, students need to be supported in their individual health and wellbeing. In our survey, we asked: **'Do you feel NTU values your health and wellbeing?'** 91% of students answered yes.



We were interested in the variation across campuses considering the unique culture at each. The following percentages of students stated they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied':

Brackenhurst: **95%** City: **92%** Clifton: **88%** Confetti: **100%** Mansfield: **83%**

In relation to this, we wanted to see if NTU's support services were accessible for those who required help. Our survey asked: **'How satisfied are you with your ability to access Student Support Services at NTU?'** 83% answered either 'very satisfied', or 'somewhat satisfied'.

These results were reflected in the comments to our survey where considerable praise was given to NTU Support Services. students gave additional comments about their positive experiences when they have needed them, with some stressing their gratitude to the staff. However, both this and the previous question highlighted differentiation between campuses. Brackenhurst campus received consistently positive reviews, with students praising the speed of responses they received, and the empathy of staff, both in Student Support, and from academics. Particular comments from focus groups highlighted the impressive support students received during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the #me project, extra-curricular support for examinations, drop-in sessions, and flexibility and understanding with regards to mental health.

There is clear feedback that the smaller campuses (Mansfield, Brackenhurst and Confetti), provide a supportive environment that not only helps students learn, but fosters a sense of community and

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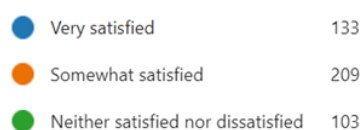
belonging. In turn, students feel supported and valued, helping them to reach a higher academic standard. This was echoed by focus groups at Confetti and Mansfield which both highlighted the supportive nature of staff/student relationships, where they feel empowered to reach out for the help that they need. Furthermore, students at Confetti campus specifically noted that the personal tutors were outstanding for providing pastoral and academic support, enabling them to perform better in their classes.

The disparity between campuses can be seen when comparing the experience between the smaller, close-knit communities, with the larger campus populations based at Clifton and City. These campuses reported that there was very good access to support services, however they would prefer more face-to-face support from academics as well as more informal wellbeing activities. It was also raised that although some appreciate the opportunity to access these services online, others want to meet with staff in-person which is not always an option. Although the consensus was generally positive, there were 2 occasions in which students at the larger sites reported issues of being sent in circles while trying to access mental health support.

City students requested targeted communications highlighting more explicit opportunities for support. They acknowledge that the information is available, but it can get lost amongst the sheer volume of communications. The staff that prioritise ensuring students are aware of the support are therefore particularly valued. Students were evidently learning from each other throughout the focus groups, often bringing to each other's' attention support options available, highlighting that the disparity in the information which they receive is on a course as well as campus level.

Section 3: Student Outcomes

We have limited access to recent graduates, as they are no longer our members and we do not hold their data. We alternatively focussed on how NTU supports current students to achieve in their degree and beyond. We focussed on areas that can affect their career progression and personal development, as well as the ability to access services after they have left, as this is key in NTU's ethos. We began by considering how NTU supports the continuing professional development (CPD) of students. Our survey asked: **'How satisfied are you with the level of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) provided throughout your studies?'** We found **72%** were either, 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied'.



Survey comments around CPD highlighted that a lot of students are unaware of how it can affect their outcomes and career progression. All campuses mentioned the importance of basic skills within CPD, including 'classes on how to operate various software' and 'how to write cover letters and CVs'. There were also comments focusing on transferrable skills that can be used across industries, including soft skills, such as time management. Almost all focus groups referenced how practical learning is incredibly important to applying their teaching to industry and real-life scenarios, however the majority of first year students were unaware of how CPD was integrated into their course. Some had little concept of what CPD is, and it was suggested by others that it

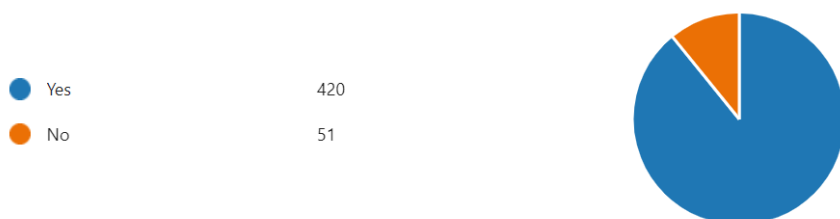
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should not be part of the course until second year. The over-arching theme was that students who did not appear to value CPD, or felt it was unnecessary, were those who did not have a clear grasp of what it was. This suggests that students should have CPD embedded into their course from the very start, with the value of it made explicit. Students need support to have a full understanding on how it works and can affect their career progression. They also requested specific guidance on up-to-date developments in their industries, so they can recognise what CPD they require, again highlighting a need for a tailored approach to students, in this case to better impact their outcomes.

Mansfield students noted that extra support with placement opportunities on smaller campuses would be useful as they are based further afield from large cities. On the other hand, students were highly complimentary about CPD opportunities within their courses. This is due to the portfolio management throughout their course and the focus on how they can use this to sell their personal brand to future employers.

Other City students explained that their future careers focused on theory, so they found elements of CPD less relevant, and felt it should be optional. A further finding from City students, was the need for more short-term placement opportunities, to improve career prospects.

As a key theme throughout this submission, we can see further disparities between courses and campuses. Clifton students are given sufficient information about CPD, and it is well embedded into Science and Technology courses. The discussions around CPD naturally led on to a focus on employability and the prospects of students. The survey asked: **'Do you feel able to access the support you need from NTU Employability Services?'**



89% of students answered that they were able to access the services they needed.

from the survey specifically mentioning the good service that had been provided to them.

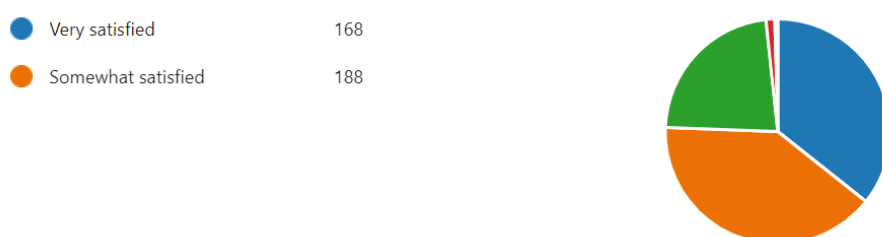
The Employability Service was also praised **17** times as accessible in optional survey comments, and was quoted as 'the most visible service that any student can access' at NTU. The conversations from the focus groups furthered these positive results. The CV checker tool on the Employability website was specifically mentioned as being very useful, as was the live chat function. Both functions were described as having a positive impact on the students, allowing them to quickly find the support they needed. It was noted however that the overall website could be confusing, and required some simplifying, so students were better able to navigate for support. The location of the service itself was also mentioned as difficult for students to find. Although there are some good online resources, students did mention that in-person meetings are still sometimes preferable, and one student who had been directed online recommended further promotion of face-to-face opportunities with the team.

Brackenhurst focus groups added that the service had been helpful with placements, both for students on sandwich courses, and those looking for short term opportunities. Mansfield students

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echoed these comments but did not feel they had many local opportunities available to them in Mansfield. They appreciated the support offered by the service but questioned how effective it could be considering limitations in the area. City and Clifton students offered more points for improvement. City students felt that too many opportunities advertised required prior experience or qualifications, which felt counterproductive for those looking to develop their skills set prior to graduation. Clifton students also suggested that the Employability Service could promote more awareness of alternative career paths such as freelancing, as opposed to only focussing on traditional career paths.

Throughout conversations on CPD and employability, students were understandably preoccupied with what comes next beyond their degree, if they are being prepared, and ultimately, what their outcomes will be. We felt these priorities were relevant to the NTU ambition of a 'community of lifelong learners' referenced in their strategy. We asked students the following: **'How satisfied are you that there is a culture of life-long learning at NTU?'**:



76% were 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied'. There were **16** optional comments made by students stating that they did not understand what this meant, which can perhaps be applied to some of the **23%** who were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. Students in focus groups had varying definitions of what lifelong learning meant to them, however despite the disparity in meaning, most felt that NTU provided the appropriate culture. Some felt lifelong learning was supported by their lecturers encouraging students to look beyond course content alone, while others felt it was being provided with the skills to be successful in life. Many students felt that life-long learning referred specifically to their continuation of education beyond university, and there was an anxiousness across the board about the access to university resources beyond graduation. There is an uncertainty about the extent to which NTU would support students beyond this point, so some clarity on this would be beneficial and reassuring to students. The priority of NTU students was that their various definitions of lifelong learning are provided for by NTU, even though they may vary between individuals. Confetti students summarised this, stating that 'NTU does not need to provide a definition of lifelong learning... it is naturally embedded into their course and so providing a definition of it would not feel authentic and be less organic'.

Conclusion

A tailored and individual approach is the overwhelming priority for NTU students. The students who have the most content and productive experiences are those who have the appropriate facilities for their specific courses, receive support suited to their unique needs, receive development in line with their personal goals, and are taught by staff who recognise their personal learning styles. It is difficult to put a statistic on this as some students experience some of these elements and not others. It is clear that NTU has the potential to deliver in all of these areas, and in many instances does, however the institution needs to work to ensure all staff, courses and campuses work to deliver a consistently individual approach.